

ATTIS

RELIGIONS IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD

EDITORS

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VOLUME 149



ATTIS

Between Myth and History: King, Priest and God

BY

MARIA GRAZIA LANCELLOTTI



BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON · KÖLN
2002

This series Religions in the Graeco-Roman World presents a forum for studies in the social and cultural function of religions in the Greek and the Roman world, dealing with pagan religions both in their own right and in their interaction with and influence on Christianity and Judaism during a lengthy period of fundamental change. Special attention will be given to the religious history of regions and cities which illustrate the practical workings of these processes.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lancellotti, Maria Grazia

Attis between myth and history : king, priest, and god / Maria Grazia Lancellotti.

p. cm. — (Religions in the Graeco-Roman world, ISSN 0927-7633 ; v. 149)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 9004128514 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Attis (God) 2. Cultus, Greek. I. Title. II. Series.

BL820.A84 L36 2002

292.2'113—dc21

2002074682

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Lancellotti, Maria Grazia:

Attis between myth and history : king, priest, and god / by Maria Grazia

Lancellotti.. – Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2002

(Religions in the Graeco-Roman world ; Vol. 149)

ISBN 90-04-12851-4

ISSN 0927-7633

ISBN 90 04 12851 4

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

To Paolo

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PREFACE

The present work does not intend to be either a new critical catalogue of all the sources concerning the Great Mother and Attis or else a global study that examines this vast topic and analyses it from every possible aspect. Recent research has already completed or is in the process of completing this task in an excellent way (cf. *infra*), while several recent surveys – such as those by P. Borgeaud (1996) and L. E. Roller (1999) – would render superfluous and so probably useless any book claiming to be exhaustive or else prompted by the concern to tackle this problem in a global way.

It may be true, on the one hand, that it is impossible to attempt a study of this kind without being aware of every possible angle of interpretation and without taking into account, in varying degrees, what each implies. Yet, on the other hand, it is also true that it is possible to avoid re-formulating a general synthesis, once certain specific keys to interpretation have been identified that are largely innovative. In that case the problem, instead, is how to harmonise the new approaches – and the results that may be derived from them – with what has already been gained, that is, with the facts that are available and the interpretations of those facts that, even though not absolutely certain and unquestioned, are at least marked by a wide and qualified consensus in the scholarly world.

In the light of these reflections, it will immediately be obvious that the present work has exactly the features just indicated. In fact, it was sparked off by one dominant intuition (accompanied by other “lesser” intuitions) that arose from re-reading the documentation on Attis and it has been verified in the course of a detailed study. To cut a long story short, the starting point was a presupposition very different from the one that so far has inspired studies on Attis, which, in essence, have run along two lines of research. On one hand, the original divine nature of Attis has been maintained, that is, to say, he was an ancient Anatolian god linked to a goddess and connected with seasonal fecundity/fertility. On the other hand, there has been a tendency to deny that in the archaic period of his history, Attis was a divine being. Instead, the emphasis has been placed on the fundamental role played by the eunuch priests of the Anatolian Great Mother in the development of that character, whose “divine” form, in the final

analysis, was “classical” (i.e. Greek and Roman).

The religio-historical analysis I have attempted here is based on the following presupposition: the correct way to read mythical traditions is first of all to try to place them within the original contexts in which they were circulated. Accordingly, the aim of my research was not to go in search of the “original Attis” – a unique figure that probably never existed as such – but to reconsider the mythical and cultic information in all its variant forms, trying to provide proof of the processes of “construction” and “reconstruction” that have contributed to the “moulding” of the different forms of Attis that developed, in the course of time, as a result of various demands within different religious cultures.

Analysis of the sources and (as far as possible) their exact position in the respective cultic contexts has therefore been the basic presupposition. From it an attempt has been made to grasp the meaning of the re-readings, interpretations and new formulations in an historical perspective, sensitive, in other words, to the meaning that such changes must have represented within the cult of Attis in various historical periods and in the various places where it was accepted. And this seemed – and in fact did seem – the more interesting due to the fact that Attis, to a much greater extent than other so-called “dying gods”, was ultimately the chosen battlefield on which the last weak forces of a complex polytheistic system, now in demise, had to pit themselves against the forces of newborn Christianity, strong and in the ascendant.

Here it should be added that in the course of my research, two particular aspects have appeared as characteristic of Attis and are always linked with him – permitting the supposition that they represented the ultimate “nucleus”, the truly primeval “kernel” of traditions concerning him – namely, the royal aspect and the funerary aspect. It is genuinely difficult not to maintain that, precisely on the basis of these aspects, first the pre-classical Anatolian world, then the Greek world and finally the Roman world developed the various mythical and ritual traditions that have reached us through a complex process of transmission. However, as in games with mirrors where it is difficult or impossible to differentiate between a reflector and its reflection, every re-interpretation has in turn become the basis on which other re-readings have been grafted, in a surprising and complex play of superimposition and reformulation, until the imperial period when – in a continual cultural and creative process – the exegetical aim of

philosophers or the critical stamp of Christian apologists was often superimposed on the cultic data.

*

This book is the result of lengthy reflection and research on the topic. Some of its fundamental stages – even if not always immediately and directly connected – have been my monograph on the Naassenes (2000), the conference on the problem of the so-called “dying god” that I gave at the *V^e Colloque International “La Transeuphratène à l’époque perse: religions, croyances, rites et images”* (Paris 30/3-1/4, 2000) and the essay “Attis, il caro estinto”, written for the collective work on so-called “dying gods”, edited by P. Xella (2001).

The “Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei” (Rome) has judged my research of interest and has also given it tangible support by awarding me their annual scholarship, named after Raffaele Pettazzoni. During this period, my research was conducted under the direction of Prof. Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, whom I here wish to thank cordially. This financial support has facilitated my work but, more importantly, it has also ensured that this book ploughed the same furrow as the school founded by the great Master to which I am proud to belong.

It is not possible to mention the names of all those who, in various ways, have helped me to complete this book. I wish at least to thank them here collectively. I would only like to mention explicitly and with deep gratitude, Professor Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli, who believed in me and granted me his attention, his humane understanding and his solid support. I owe a special debt to Professors Philippe Borgeaud, Jan Bremmer, Ileana Chirassi Colombo, Hendrik S. Versnel and Biagio Virgilio, for reading the text prior to publication and for giving me, along with extremely constructive critical comments, a series of valuable suggestions and recommendations that I have tried to take into account. Of course, I alone am responsible for the opinions expressed in this book. Once again I am indebted to my dear friend and colleague Wilfred G. E. Watson not only for his excellent translation of another book of mine into English but also for being so readily available, for his exchange of ideas and for his humane understanding.

As soon as new hypotheses are formulated or avenues of research are attempted that seem to be substantially innovative, there arise numerous doubts and fears, especially when this implies confronta-

tion with great scholars, both past and present. The delicate dialectic between the enthusiasm of discovery and a subtle sense of “irreverence” results in complex moods that are not easily controlled. In such cases one should always be aware that only the precious intellectual commitment of one’s predecessors allows new “fronts” to be opened up and approaches to be taken that derive, no less, from the refinement of methods of research that are due to the scholars who preceded us. All this has also happened to me, of course, and the awareness just described has never left me for a single instant. In addition, I had another source from which to draw, solid support and the encouragement to continue writing this book: the lucid way in which Angelo Brelich approached the history of religions. His example in the formulation of problems and in the methodology to resolve them, have been the ideal that inspired these pages and that guided my research. To him, who is no longer with us, and to Paolo Xella, who has been able to convey to me both in his writings and in long, impassioned discussion, the scientific curiosity, the methodological rigour, the theoretical lucidity and the moral integrity that he shares with his teacher, I dedicate this work.

*

In this book there will be no systematic reference to general surveys of the main issues connected with the myth and cult of Attis and, by tradition, the basic reference points for the topic. It is easy to appreciate that they have been the foundation, so to speak, on which my research has been systematically based and on which it depends. In other words, although the documentation has been used and assimilated in the course of my research, in order not to overburden the footnotes, it will be mentioned explicitly only when useful and necessary for the economy of my argument. By this I mean specifically the following works:

H. Graillot, *Le culte de Cybèle, Mère des dieux à Rome et dans l'Empire romain*, Paris 1912; M.J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis, the Myth and the Cult*, London 1977; G. Sfameni Gasparro, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis*, Leiden 1985; P. Borgeaud, *La Mère des dieux*, Paris 1996; E. N. Lane (ed.), *Cybele, Attis and Related Cults. Essays in Memory of M.J. Vermaseren*, Leiden–New York–Köln 1996; L.E. Roller, *In Search of God the Mother. The Cult of Anatolian Cybele*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1999. For the literary sources H. Hepding, *Attis, seine*

Mythen und sein Kult, Giessen 1903 is still indispensable, while for epigraphic and iconographic sources, the standard works are M.J. Vermaseren (ed.), *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque*, Leiden 1977-1989, in seven volumes, and F. Naumann, *Der Ikonographie der Kybele in der phrygischen und der griechischen Kunst* (Istanbuler Mitteilungen, Beiheft 28), Tübingen 1983, to be completed by the entries *Attis* (Vermaseren – De Boer 1986) and *Kybele* (Simon 1997) in the LIMC.

As is well known, these basic works as a whole comprise the almost complete repertory of epigraphic, iconographic and literary documentation on Attis, and reference to these works, whenever necessary, has enabled me to avoid tedious repetition of quotations or lists of sources. The result, or so I hope, has been to make my argument flow better. I have, of course, taken account of any new information provided by recent critical editions and commentaries on the literary sources. The same applies to new epigraphic and iconographic evidence, although these are only noted where relevant to my research. I should also add that the profile of this research work is religio-historical and not philological, but it does not mean that the various problems connected with the textual tradition and the chronology of the sources have not been considered. In any case, such problems do not belong to the specific aim of religio-historical research which is basically interested in the cultural layering of contents over historical time and can prescind from the age of the text that transmits them.

One last clarification concerns the goddess who accompanies Attis. Here I do not deal directly with this complex deity except, of course, with specific reference to Attis. For this goddess I have used the conventional and generic expression “Great Mother”, but more precise terms such as Cybele, Mother of the gods, etc, are used where the argument requires.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: ANCIENT ACCOUNTS AND MODERN STUDY

1.1. *Mythical traditions*

The analysis and classification of classical literary sources concerning Attis have been profoundly influenced by the distinction made by Hugo Hepding between a “Phrygian” version and a “Lydian” version of the myth, definitions derived from the origin and background of the events narrated¹. The “Lydian” version is marked by the killing of Attis by a boar; the “Phrygian” version, instead, ends with his castration and death.

This subdivision of the sources has generally been accepted by scholars and is often repeated. However, this does not eliminate the fact that in many respects it seems somewhat rigid and, in my opinion, it cannot always work effectively as an organizing principle for all the mythical accounts concerning Attis. Above all, the accounts that are considered to belong to either one version or the other present differences that are certainly not negligible and in addition, there is no lack of clear indications of “contamination” of one by the other.

Even so, the general classification proposed by Hepding retains a certain usefulness from the heuristic point of view, particularly if used generically as a conventional criterion for making a distinction between documents that would have Attis die from being struck by a boar (the Lydian version) and those that instead report his suicide by emasculation (the Phrygian version). At all events this distinction will be the convenient starting point for a rapid review of mythical traditions concerning Attis, even if the labels “Lydian” and “Phrygian” are used only in the conventional sense already mentioned. What follows is not a complete and systematic description of the various mythical accounts but instead a precise definition of their distinctive motifs and more significant phases.

For the so-called “Phrygian” version of the Attis myth the authors

¹ Hepding 1903, pp. 98-122.

concerned are, in chronological order, Ovid, Pausanias and Arnobius. In the account by Ovid², Attis is a Phrygian youth of extraordinary beauty who, loved chastely by the *dea turrigera*³, consecrates himself to her by swearing eternal faithfulness to her, but he then betrays her with the tree-nymph Sagaritis, with terrible consequences for the two lovers. In fact, the nymph dies from the blows inflicted on her tree by the goddess, while Attis is driven mad and finally emasculates himself⁴.

The account given by Pausanias has so many similarities with the one given by Arnobius that Hepding sets them out in parallel columns⁵. In the opinion of some scholars, the two versions go back to a common source, Timotheus, cited explicitly by Arnobius, but only by him⁶. The more detailed account by Arnobius, as against the summary version by Pausanias, may be due to the fact that it also includes other traditions⁷.

I consider it necessary to present the two versions separately since they have interesting differences that are of the outmost significance. The account by Pausanias is not a “shortened” version by him of the parallel account provided more fully by Arnobius⁸. Instead, it may represent a different stage of the “history” of this tradition.

Pausanias⁹ recounts the story, calling it an ἐπιχώριος λόγος, an “indigenous account”, that was told in Pessinous. During his sleep, Zeus has a seminal emission that falls on the ground and fecundates

² Ov., *Fasti* IV vv. 223-224.

³ The Mother of the gods was often represented in Rome wearing a mural crown, but the oldest examples (3rd-2nd cent. BCE) come from Pergamon. They comprise two statuettes where the goddess has a crown in the form of a tower, cf. Roller 1999, p. 207 and fig. 56.

⁴ The transformation of Attis into a pine-tree, which is not mentioned in the *Fasti*, is instead recounted by Ovid in *Metamorph.* X vv. 103-105. In *Ibis* vv. 505-506 Attis is killed by a pine, cf. André 1963, comm. *ad loc.*, p. 50, n. 14.

⁵ Hepding 1903, pp. 37-40.

⁶ Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 5: *Apud Timotheum, non ignobilem theologorum unum, nec non apud alios aequae doctos super Magna deorum Matre superque sacris eius origo haec sita est, ex reconditis antiquitatum libris et ex intimis eruta, quemadmodum ipse scribit insinuatque, mysteriis.* On the identification of the Timotheus in question with Timotheus the Eumolpid, see most recently Turcan 1996, pp. 387-388; Borgeaud 1997, p. 66 and p. 72. However, this identification is not universally accepted, cf. Lane 1996, p. 128 n. 21; Roller 1999, p. 244, n. 20. If it really were Timotheus the Eumolpid, the version would go back at least to the 3rd cent. BCE.

⁷ Cf. Hepding, 1903, p. 104ff. and more recently Mora 1994, p. 116ff.; Turcan 1996, p. 387ff.; Borgeaud 1996, p. 72ff.

⁸ Cf. Mora 1994, p. 127.

⁹ Paus., VII 17, 9-12.

it. From it a *daimon* is born called Agdistis, with both male and female sexual organs. Terrified, the gods emasculate him. From his member an almond tree grows, laden with fruit. A daughter of the river Sangarius picks one and puts it on her lap, the fruit disappears and the girl becomes pregnant. The child that is born is exposed but is saved thanks to the care of a he-goat. As he grows up, he proves to be of unmatched beauty and Agdistis falls in love with him. When he reaches marriageable age, Attis is sent by his relatives to Pessinous to marry the king's daughter. Just when the nuptial song is being intoned, Agdistis appears and causes a frenzy in the bystanders, especially in Attis who, caught up by the *mania*, emasculates himself, as does the father-in-law. Attis dies and Agdistis, repenting of what she has done, asks Zeus not to allow the youth's body either to putrefy or to wither away.

According to the version by Arnobius¹⁰, there was a huge rock in Phrygia which the local people called "Agdos". According to the oracle of Themis, stones taken from it were thrown by Deucalion and Pyrrha onto the earth, at that time devoid of mortals; from this rock the Great Mother was also fashioned and then animated "divinely" (*divinitus*). While she was sleeping quietly on top of the rock, Jupiter lusted after her incestuously. Having struggled for some time without being able to possess her, the frustrated god ejaculated into the stone. The stone conceived and Agdistis¹¹ was born, named after his mother (i.e. the rock). He was particularly violent and fierce, androgynous and driven by an insane libido. With his extraordinary strength he laid waste to everything he laid his hands on, impervious to gods and men. Assembled together, the gods wondered how to put a stop to such violence. In the end the task was entrusted to Liber, who, knowing the spring at which Agdistis usually slaked his thirst, mixed its waters with wine. After drinking it, Agdistis fell into a deep sleep. Liber then tied his sexual organs to the soles of his feet so that on waking, as soon as he moved, he emasculated himself. From the wound there flowed an immense amount of blood that the earth drank up, from which a pomegranate was immediately born, laden with fruit. Nana, daughter of King Sangarius (or of the river with the same name)¹², took a fruit

¹⁰ Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 5-7.

¹¹ On the various spellings of this name cf. Gusmani 1959, pp. 203-206; Robert 1980, pp. 236-240.

¹² This variation is in the text of Arnobius.

and placed it in her lap, and became pregnant from it. Her father considered her to be disgraced and confined her, condemning her to die of starvation. But the Mother of the gods nourished her with apples and other food and Nana gave birth to a son. So Sangarius ordered him to be exposed, but even so the baby managed to survive¹³, was nourished with billy-goat's milk¹⁴ and was given the name Attis. Endowed with extraordinary beauty, he became the favourite of the Mother of the gods and of Agdistis. The latter made the acquaintance of the youth, now grown up, as a flattering companion, leading him through woods and giving him the game he caught, which Attis said he himself had caught. But once, when he was drunk, he confessed both the relationship between him and Agdistis and the fact that Agdistis had been the hunter, not he himself. Then Midas, the king of Pessinous, wishing to prevent the youth having such a notorious relationship, arranged a marriage with his daughter and so that nothing could interrupt the festivities, he had the city closed. But the Mother of the gods, who knew the adolescent's fate and also knew that he would be safe as long as he was not married, lifted the walls of the city with her head (...) ¹⁵ and went in. Agdistis also went in, burning with rage, and filled all the guests with frenzy and madness. Seized with panic, the Phrygians shouted aloud when the goddesses appeared, the daughter of the concubine of Gallus cut off her breast; Attis took the *fistula* used by Agdistis to provoke madness and, filled with rage, ended by emasculating himself under a pine-tree¹⁶. As his blood flowed away so too did his life. The Great Mother gathered up the pieces that had been cut off and buried them, after covering and wrapping them with the dead man's clothes. From the spilt blood a violet grew which encircled the pine-tree. The betrothed girl, Ia, covered the chest of the lifeless youth with soft wool, wept for him with Agdistis and then killed herself. At her death, her blood was transformed into purple violets. The Mother of the gods also shed bitter tears from which an almond tree sprang up, and then she took the sacred pine-tree, under which

¹³ Here the text is corrupt and it is impossible to obtain further details from it.

¹⁴ It was, in fact, the milk of a he-goat, on which cf. Borgeaud 1996, p. 225, n. 76. For a he-goat to produce milk was considered a good omen in antiquity, cf. Arist., *Hist. Anim.* 522a = III 20. I owe this reference to the kindness of Philippe Borgeaud.

¹⁵ The text is corrupt.

¹⁶ Borgeaud has noted an interesting comparison between the words spoken by the youth at the moment of castration in the versions by Arnobius and Ovid (*Fasti*) and the passage from the *Acts of John* which asserts the sexual impulse to be harmful to man, Borgeaud 1996, pp. 138-139 and n. 35.

Attis had emasculated himself, into her den and joined the funeral laments of Agdistis, smiting her breast and walking round the trunk of the tree. Agdistis begged Jupiter to bring Attis back to life (*revivisceret*), but that was not permitted. Instead the god agreed that the body of Attis should not putrefy, that his hair should always grow and that his little finger should move for eternity. Satisfied with these favours, Agdistis consecrated the dead man's body to Pessinous and honoured him with yearly ceremonies and priestly services.

Thus far the three accounts that, together with other minor texts, comprise the "Phrygian version". Evidently, only certain elements are common to the versions by Pausanias and Arnobius that quite clearly differ in several basic aspects from the one by Ovid, which therefore cannot be considered a simple variant of the "Phrygian" version. One fact in particular specifically claims our attention. In the accounts in Pausanias and Arnobius, what happens to Attis is marked by a certain *passivity* on his part, as he accepts (or even undergoes) the attentions of Agdistis, or of Agdistis and the Great Mother, and the decision of the relatives or of King Midas to marry him off. However, in Ovid's version, Attis himself is the initiator of a very real *transgression*: here the union, that was not consummated according to the other two versions, does indeed take place and is, so to speak, "aggravated" by the oath of loyalty previously made by Attis to the Great Mother in her temple. Here, the emasculation episode ratifies the fact that exclusive faithfulness to the goddess – judged as impossible to keep because a tempting nymph could appear at any time and anywhere – is fulfilled only by the extreme sacrifice of his own manhood.

Leaving aside for the moment the differences to be discussed below, the versions by Pausanias and Arnobius both share the idea that the relationship between Agdistis and Attis is disastrous for him just when he is going to get married¹⁷. The consequence of this is the self-emasculation that causes his death, even if somewhat mitigated by the incorruptibility of his body. In this case, the idea that the relationship between Agdistis and Attis was first ratified by some sort of "pact", later broken by the youth, seems to be completely

¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that this is the "human" viewpoint. In the account by Arnobius, instead, the Mother of the gods considers the marriage to be disastrous for Attis. The madness and resulting death could then be interpreted, not as a "punishment" by the goddess but, instead, as the wish to remove Attis from social and cultural life, "saving him" for ever from the world of men.

missing¹⁸: Attis agrees to the marriage without any prejudice whereas it is Agdistis who reacts violently, unleashing the frenzy that impels the youth to the fatal act¹⁹.

The idea of a “sacred” link between Attis and the goddess is not exclusive to these versions. In fact, it reappears in a series of texts that describe Attis as the priest who began the cults of the Great Mother, and often pays for his complete dedication to her with death.

According to Pausanias²⁰, Hermesianax knew a tradition about Attis as a Phrygian priest founder of the cult of the Great Mother, who went to Lydia. In song 220 of book VI of the *Anthologia Palatina* (Dioscorides)²¹, the “pure” Atys is defined as “curator of the thalamus” (*thalamēpolos*) of Cybele. Having succeeded in scaring off a lion by beating the sacred tambourine while on his way from Pessinous to Sardis, he promised to build the goddess a sacred “cella” (*thalamē*) on the bank of the river Sangarius. In song 63 by Catullus, Attis is a youth who emasculated himself in the grip of insanity with which Cybele infused him, and is presented as “head” of the Galli, that is, of the eunuch priests of the goddess. A Lydian Attis, as the founder of the cult of Rhea among Lydians, Phrygians and Samothracians, is recorded by Lucian²².

According to the version by Servius, Attis is a very handsome boy consecrated to the Great Mother²³. In this case, emasculation and death are the results of an attempt to escape from the king of his city, who lusts after him: in fact the youth emasculates the king who, as he is dying, returns the favour. The priests of the Great Mother find him in his death throes under a pine-tree, carry him into the temple and bury him there: it is in memory of this event that they emasculate themselves.

¹⁸ Even if it is noted that in the version by Arnobius, the “confession” of a drunken Attis could imply a pre-existent pact of silence between the youth and Agdistis. But this belongs to the level of an interpretative logic that is not necessarily the logic of myth.

¹⁹ On the topic of jealousy as the cause of the youth’s death see also Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. rel.* III 1.

²⁰ Quoted n. 9.

²¹ Dioscorides 16, Gow – Page a, pp. 85-86. On this epigram and others included in the *Anthologia Palatina* which drew inspiration from it, cf. Gow 1960. Also on the epigrams of the *Anthologia Palatina* cf. Lane 1996a and Pachis 1996.

²² *De Syria dea*, ch. 15.

²³ Serv., *Ad Aen.* IX 115.

In the case of the so-called “Lydian” version, also, the evidence is anything but uniform and has very different elements. According to some scholars, it is clearly influenced by the complex of mythical traditions about Adonis²⁴.

Herodotus²⁵ mentions a certain Atys, son of Croesus, killed during a boar hunt by a Phrygian prince, Adrastus, a son of Midas and a nephew of Gordias²⁶. The antecedent to the event is to be found in a crime committed by Gyges who, by killing Candaules, took his wife for himself and also took possession of the kingdom of Lydia. The Pythia prophesies that this misdeed will be avenged on the fifth (fourth)²⁷ descendant of the Mermnad clan²⁸. It is in fact Croesus, the king with immense wealth, who seems to have attracted the anger of a god because he considers himself to be the happiest of men²⁹. He is the father of two sons, one excelling in everything and much loved, called Atys, and the other instead a deaf mute who is completely ignored by his father. A dream reveals to Croesus that he is to lose his favourite son as a result of a wound by an iron spike. Accordingly, he tries in every way to thwart (or at least postpone) the ill-omened event: first of all he makes his son marry, then he removes all weapons from the men’s apartments to prevent his son being wounded accidentally. Meanwhile a stranger arrives at court who asks to be purified as he has committed a murder. He is Adrastus, a Phrygian prince, a son of Midas and a nephew of Gordias, who accidentally killed his brother and therefore, stripped of his privileges, has been exiled by his father. The cathartic rites completed, Croesus welcomes him to court. A delegation from Mysia notifies the king that a huge boar is destroying the fields of that region and asks for the assistance of some men led by Atys. Croesus willingly supplies the men but refuses to send his son on the pretext that he is occupied with his wedding. When he gets to know this, Atys goes to his father and asks why he has been deprived of the very exploits that are an occasion of honour, namely hunting and warfare. So the father reveals his dream to

²⁴ Cf. *infra*.

²⁵ Herod., I 34-45.

²⁶ This account is not included in Hepding’s collection, who mentions it only in the commentary, as he considers it to be a relic of an older tradition.

²⁷ For the calculation by which the fifth is really the fourth cf. Legrand 1970, note *ad loc.*

²⁸ Herod., I 6-13.

²⁹ Herod., I 34.

him, but Atys points out to Croesus that a boar hunt does not fit the actions of the risk: it involves fighting an animal and not an armed man. Croesus is convinced but places Atys under the protection of Adrastus. And it is precisely Adrastus who, during the hunt, misses the target and hits Atys with his spear, who is thus mortally wounded. At the news the king laments, although he forgives Adrastus as he sees him as the instrument and not the cause of Atys' death, as wished by a deity. The account ends with Adrastus' suicide on the tomb of the young prince.

For Hermesianax, Attis is a priest who is killed by a savage beast sent by Zeus: the excessive honours that the *Mētēr* confers on him arouse the god's anger³⁰. It should be stressed that, in this version, Attis is said to be sterile "from birth". Then, Plutarch's interpretation of the passage is difficult, as it mentions two characters called Attis, one a Syrian and the other an Arcadian, both killed by a boar³¹. Furthermore, the scholiast who commented on the *Alexipharmakon* of Nicander also makes Attis a young Phrygian shepherd, loved by the Mother of the gods, who heaps him with honours and so arouses the envy of Zeus, who causes his death by sending him against a boar³².

Lastly, another version can be mentioned, too hastily defined as "euhemeristic"³³, which can be ascribed neither to the "Phrygian" nor to the "Lydian" tradition, i.e. the account by Diodorus Siculus³⁴. Cybele, daughter of Maion, the king of Phrygia and Lydia, and of a woman called Dyndime, is exposed at birth on Mount Kybelon. Kept alive by milk from wild animals, the baby girl is then reared by some women who are herding flocks and they call her "Cybele". As she grows up she is revealed to have unusual gifts. Extremely beautiful and virtuous, she invents musical instruments and with purification rites she heals children and flocks, and for this she is called "mother of the mountain". She is loved with chaste love by Marsyas. In the flower of her youth she falls in love with a local boy called Attis and

³⁰ Fr. 8 Powell, pp. 105-106 = Paus., VII 17, 9.

³¹ Plut., *Sert.* 1, 4.

³² Schol. in v. 8, Geymonat a, p. 32.

³³ In fact, the vague historical context of the episode and the characters does not impugn the genuine mythical dimension of the account. On the problem of Euhemerism cf. Ribichini 1985; Cancik-Lindemaier 1999, with essential bibliography. On this crucial point, cf. *infra*, pp. 40-42.

³⁴ Diod. Sic., III 58, 1 – 59, 8.

from their union she conceives a child. At the same time she is recognised by her own parents and received into the palace. But when her father realises that she is no longer a virgin, he puts the lad and the foster-mothers to death and leaves the bodies unburied. Full of grief, Cybele wanders through the land accompanied by Marsyas³⁵, while Phrygia is in the grip of famine and pestilence. An (unspecified) god is questioned on how to overcome these calamities and he replies that body of Attis has to be buried and Cybele has to be worshipped as a goddess. As it is not possible to recover the corpse of the youth, the Phrygians erect a statue before which, at the appropriate time, they intone funeral laments and thus atone for the anger of the one who had been unjustly punished. These rites, again according to Diodorus, continued to be performed even in his day. As for Cybele, in ancient times the Phrygians erected altars to her on which they celebrated yearly sacrifices. Later, they erected a magnificent temple in Pessinous and splendid rites were initiated, promoted by King Midas.

The various mythical traditions about Attis described above are also recorded or mentioned in passages by other writers and, in some cases, they are reinterpreted in the light of philosophical and religious applications that, in spite of giving them “hidden” meanings and re-reading them in an allegorical or natural way, do not substantially alter their narrative sequence.

1.2. *Modern studies*

In the “Phrygian” version of the myth there are almost continual references to Phrygia and in particular to the sacred city of Pessinous where, at least from Hellenistic times, but probably also earlier, there was a cult of a “Great Mother” goddess, whom Strabo explicitly called Agdistis. The fact that Pausanias records this version, defining it as an “indigenous account” and the exegesis by Arnobius that closely linked the mythical aspects to certain ritual aspects of the cult, have led many scholars to consider the Phrygian version as the “original”. As a result, it is the one that has been studied with closer attention as it was considered more suitable for providing information about *Ur-Attis* and his myth.

³⁵ The episode of the musical contest between Marsyas and Apollo is not discussed here.

The very nature of the circumstances of the passing of Attis as narrated in the “Phrygian” version – his death but not the total corruption of his corpse, the various vegetal metamorphoses – and the exegesis that developed about that tradition at a late period, have encouraged the classification of Attis as one of the “dying and rising gods”. These are the so-called *genii* of vegetation, according to a famous theory formulated in a systematic way for the first time by J.G. Frazer in the early 1900’s and destined to be very successful³⁶.

For many years studies on Attis have never doubted that there must have been a very ancient Phrygian cult of his person, considered to be a god linked to the cycle of fertility/fecundity. And even those who later criticised Frazer’s concept of “dying and rising gods” and its application to Attis, never doubted his links with vegetation³⁷. They represent a qualifying characteristic of Attis even within the theory that produced a typology of “*dèi in vicenda*” (cf. *infra*) that, while no longer equating the god with grain or more generically with nature reawakening each spring, still considers such links to be essential for making a connection between (prototypical) myth and (typical) ritual³⁸.

Against the antiquity of the “divine nature” of Attis, however, a series of objections has been raised by some scholars who deny the existence of a Phrygian Attis/god before he was “imported” into Greece and Rome³⁹. A pioneer of that theory was P. Lambrechts, who denied that Attis was considered a god in Rome in the period before the institution of public ceremonies in his honour (2nd cent. CE). According to him, in Latin sources prior to this period, Attis did not have any divine traits but was instead a secondary character completely subordinate to Cybele. He considers 1st century CE Greek and

³⁶ On the problem of the so-called “dying and rising gods”, cf. most recently Xella 2001 and the earlier bibliography cited in that work.

³⁷ In his monograph on Cybele and Attis, Graillot 1912, *passim*, often substantiates complete acceptance of Frazer’s theory. For the interpretation of Attis as a “vegetation god”, cf. also Pettazzoni 1997 (1924), p. 83; Cumont 1929, pp. 52-53; Gressmann 1930, p. 94; Brelich 1958a; Vermaseren 1966, p. 20; Fasce 1978, *passim*. But cf. Colpe 1969.

³⁸ For the analysis of this theory and its application to Attis cf. ch. 4.4.

³⁹ The most widely known opinion is that of Lambrechts, as expressed in a series of studies: Lambrechts 1952; 1962 and 1967 (cf. also Smith J.Z. 1987). More recently Roller 1994 and 1999 and Borgeaud 1988 and 1996 have voiced the same opinion, but with different arguments, and they are followed by many other scholars (for example, Smith M.S. 1997). Against this thesis and against the arguments of Lambrechts in particular, cf. Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 26-32; 1996, p. 70 n. 78.

Latin sources that mention Attis to be “absolument anodins”⁴⁰. Only from the 2nd century of our era did literary and epigraphic sources reveal a different view of Attis, considering him to be a god.

Lambrechts’ opinion was widely criticised after the discovery, in the sanctuary of Cybele on the Palatine Hill⁴¹, of a series of figurines that probably represent Attis and indicate a ritual practised before the 2nd century of our era⁴².

L.E. Roller⁴³, on the other hand, using research on the first iconographic evidence for Attis in Greece, has shown that Greek portrayals do not represent the Phrygian god specifically but express more generally the Greek image of a “foreigner”, with somewhat negative features. The figure of Attis would be a sort of “hybrid”, partly alluding to Paris (the image of a shepherd) and partly taking on certain attributes peculiar to Pan (musical instruments)⁴⁴. In Phrygia he must have been a simple human attendant of the mother goddess, which would explain his absence from the monuments. Only in Greece did he attain the rank of a companion with the same divine nature as the Phrygian goddess⁴⁵. The actual myth of Attis must have been created after his “Hellenization”, that is, it was a Greek “invention” in order to correlate two different elements: on the one hand, the mythical model of the powerful goddess who causes her partner’s destruction, and on the other, the cultic practice of castration typical of the priests of the Great Mother⁴⁶. Thus, from the aspect of iconography, “Attis came to be associated with all negative images that the Greeks had of Phrygians and also became the heir to the Greeks’ perception of Trojans as inferior Orientals”⁴⁷.

Thus, neither the myth nor the ritual of Attis must have existed

⁴⁰ Lambrechts 1952, p. 150.

⁴¹ Romanelli 1963, pp. 262-265 and 280-288; 1964, pp. 218-226.

⁴² On the position adopted by Lambrechts after the finds on the Palatine Hill cf. Lambrechts 1967, the main lines of which are summarised by Thomas 1984, p. 1506 n. 21. For a critique of this position cf. Vermaseren 1977, p. 206 n. 713.

⁴³ Roller 1994.

⁴⁴ “These negative traits would have seemed particularly appropriate for a companion of the Phrygian mother goddess, who by the 5th century had already become a symbol of the wild un-Hellenic character in Greek cult” (*ead.*, p. 253).

⁴⁵ “Attis entered Greek art and Greek cult as the companion of the mother goddess, a deity who retained strong ties with her Phrygian origins. Attis himself had been a very different figure in Phrygia, a human attendant of the goddess, not represented on Phrygian monuments” (*ead.*, p. 259).

⁴⁶ *Ead.*, p. 258.

⁴⁷ *Ead.*, p. 259.

before the arrival in Greece of the Great Mother: all the allusions to the ritual practices recorded by the first Greek witnesses would only be creations *a posteriori*. Subsequently, in a monograph on Cybele⁴⁸, Roller returned to the character of Attis: in Phrygia, in a period before his “deification” on Greek soil, the name Attis (Ates and variants) would appear, in a religious setting, linked with the royal family. After some inscriptions in which this name occurs as either dedicatee or dedicator, Roller very cautiously puts forward the hypothesis of a possible “deification” of the Phrygian king *post mortem*. At all events, she stresses the link between the priestly function, the king and the Phrygian Great Mother, a function that would remain in force even after Phrygia’s loss of independence, as proved by the title of Attis borne by the high priest of Pessinous⁴⁹. On the other hand, the funerary lament, present both in the mythical and in the cultic traditions about Attis, could have an antecedent in the royal funeral, later applied to a high priest of the Great Mother.

While in the main Roller’s interpretation can be accepted, it leaves open a fundamental question to which, in my opinion, her answer is inadequate. It concerns the castration of Attis and the function of that event within the mythical narrative. Indeed, Roller holds that since this motif is not present in all the versions, it is not “essential to the myth” and even where it does occur, “it lacks a coherent connection to the story”. Accordingly, it is a “late addendum to the myth” due to the need to harmonise two different elements: the funerary laments and the self-castration of the priests⁵⁰. At the more general level of methodology, apart from whether or not it is possible for scholars to explain all the elements that occur in the myth, the awareness that, no matter how abstruse or contradictory they might appear, each element is *suo modo*, essential and necessary, is now an accepted fact in the history of religions. Of course, “consistency” should not be sought and established on the basis of our own logical and literary categories, but instead in connection with the function that a mythical account with its episodes had within a particular culture, at a specific moment in its history. It is too simplistic to define an episode of myth as a later addition: from the religio-historical point of view, there is no “first” myth to which something is added, or from which something is taken

⁴⁸ Roller 1999.

⁴⁹ *Ead.*, pp. 111-112.

⁵⁰ *Ead.*, p. 254

away. Instead, every version must be considered complete and meaningful in itself. If, at a given moment in the mythical tradition about Attis, there is a castration episode, it means that the culture that produces the mythical version in which it is contemplated considers that episode to be necessary and useful for providing the foundation⁵¹ to an aspect of reality considered particularly important or in any case the inheritance of common experience⁵².

Adopting some of the conclusions reached by Roller in articles prior to her monograph, Borgeaud has also stressed with further arguments how Attis took on divine traits only in the classical world. His position is extensively set out in his book on the Mother of the gods⁵³. The chapter in question opens with his viewpoint concerning the traditional clear distinction between the two versions of the myth ("Phrygian" and "Lydian"): Borgeaud prefers to hold that the "Lydian" version, in which there is no mention of Attis being castrated, is dependent on the "Phrygian" version⁵⁴.

After noting that in the Anatolian evidence, epigraphic as well as iconographic, prior to the Roman period, there is absolutely no reference to a cult of Attis, Borgeaud then emphasises the use of this name for a particular priest connected with the Great Mother⁵⁵. It is only when he appears in Greece, however, that Attis is ascribed supernatural status. When the Greeks turn their attention to Phrygian ritual practices, the version in which Attis is killed by a boar is eclipsed. In that period, the 3rd cent. BCE, the term *gallos* appears and with it the element of emasculation. However, the fact that the term is not attested prior to this date does not imply the absence of the motif of castration in the previous period.

Classical literary sources concerning Attis as the proper name of a particular person – again, according to Borgeaud – would mean an evolution from lover-priest to deity. Another collection of sources, more faithful to the Anatolian data, portray him instead as a human

⁵¹ As we shall see below, in this case it is a re-foundation.

⁵² Cf. Brelich 1969; 1970-1972.

⁵³ Borgeaud 1996, pp. 56-88. But cf. also Borgeaud 1988.

⁵⁴ This would emerge from the passage that Pausanias ascribes to Hermesianax, where Attis is described as sterile from birth: "il ne semble pas que le motif de la castration soit ici véritablement inconnu, mais bien plutôt qu'il se trouve intentionnellement passé sous silence" (Borgeaud 1996, p. 58). The passage in the account by Herodotus which refers to the marriage of the young son of Croesus recalls the topic of the marriage between Attis and the mortal girl as given in the "Phrygian" version.

⁵⁵ *Id.*, p. 59.

priest. In classical Greece, the topic of castration, in respect of the historical sources, must have been removed on account of a “répugnance naturelle”⁵⁶, whereas it would have been retained at the poetic level. Yet another transformation would have occurred when the Greeks and Romans recognised the prototype of the Gallus in the mythical lover-priest. It would be a combination of human and divine, defined as a “véritable réinvention d’Attis”⁵⁷, which would have taken place by a gradual process right up to the 4th century of our era. It would be the recasting of a ritual based on Greek paradigms of a philosophical nature.

Borgeaud holds that the real ancient Near Eastern paradigm to which one must turn in order to find the “predecessors” of Attis is the paradigm concerning certain Mesopotamian priests (*assinnu*, *galatur* and *kurgarru*), who appear as “préfigurations fonctionnelles des galles de la Mère”⁵⁸. However, though set in this ancient Near Eastern background, the myth of Attis would be constructed on Greek lines⁵⁹. At the close of his analysis Borgeaud, having stressed the complexity of the myth in respect of the categories of male and female, traces it back to Pessinous, where the priestly class of eunuchs also comprised the principal magistracy of a theocratic state, whose high priests were called “Attis”⁶⁰.

In short, according to Borgeaud, there must have been a long tradition, transmitted through Lydia, which led to the creation of the “god Attis” on Greek and then on Roman soil. It had its origins in an

⁵⁶ *Id.*, p. 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*, p. 78.

⁵⁹ Evidence for this lies in the allegorical interpretations linked with vegetation and in late philosophical interpretations, while the fact concerning his resurrection seems to have been suggested by a meeting and confrontation with Christianity.

⁶⁰ “Dès lors, quand tout semble construit sur une opposition entre le sauvage et le civilisé, entre la chasse et le mariage, ce récit d’élaboration hellénistique n’a pas pour seule intention de faire l’inventaire des déviations par rapport auxquelles un ordre, celui des Grecs, se définit, mais aussi de signaler les failles par où, de l’intérieur, cet ordre apparemment dominant pourrait se voir subverti, et l’est effectivement, ailleurs, dans un rituel qui s’avère, à Pessinonte, réellement solidaire du pouvoir. Intitulé *origo*, ce récit concerne l’origine d’un système politique dirigé par des galles, tout en s’adressant à ceux, les Grecs et les Romains d’abord, qui s’interrogent sur la pratique inassimilable des pratiquants (...) d’une Cybèle souveraine. Non plus valorisation d’une norme visant à la reproduction du corps social par le mariage et la procréation d’enfants légitimes, mais valorisation néanmoins d’une norme politique, le mythe d’Attis énonce un idéal qui demeure, dans une “cité” déplacée en barbarie, l’apanage d’une minorité mystique, scandaleuse et dominante, celle des galles et des Attis pessinontiens” (Borgeaud 1996, pp. 87-88).

historical fact, that is, the existence in Anatolia of a priesthood with important political functions, that was connected with the Great Mother (or similar figures), whose followers called themselves “Attis” and practised devotional eunuchism. From this fact, at first hidden, and then partially revealed, and mythologised several times, there slowly emerged the figure of Attis, initially as a mythical lover-priest of the goddess and ultimately as a god in his own right. The complex relationship in the “Phrygian” version, between male/female/emasculatation goes back to a historical fact, the “temple-state” of Pessinous, governed by a theocracy, for which the mythical account (not the local account but the Graeco-Roman one) provides a foundation and to which it also assigns a foreign setting, distant and opposed to the norm.

These are, in summary form, the current positions of scholars in respect of Attis: on the one hand, those who, with various differences, continue to maintain the original divine nature of Attis; on the other, instead, those who hold that Attis became a god only through contact with the Greek and/or Roman world. In the first case, scholars have to take into account the lack of direct evidence for the god Attis and for his cult in Phrygia prior to his appearance in Greece. In the second case, the problem lies in determining what were the “authentically” Phrygian elements that contributed to the recasting of Attis in the classical world.

In the light of all this, I propose in this study to reconsider the facts concerning the mythical and ritual traditions about Attis, taking account of three elements in particular: the role played by Lydia; the contribution made by Phrygia; and the re-interpretations and ideological changes of function in Greece and Rome, and later in Christianity. In this perspective, the different variants of the mythical tradition will be carefully evaluated in order to obtain information about the various stages of the “history” of Attis, the character considered here.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROOTS OF THE MYTH: ATTIS BETWEEN LYDIA AND PHRYGIA

2.1. *Attis and ancient Anatolian myths*

In view of the difficulties in finding eloquent and unequivocal evidence of the myth and cult of Attis in Phrygia in the period before Greek documents, research has been directed at the oldest myths in Anatolia in an attempt to reconstruct the “prehistory” of this character and so link him with earlier local religious traditions. Here I analyse some of the proposals that have been more widely accepted in order to extract elements useful for my own research.

Some scholars, starting from the supposition that both Attis and the god Telipinu are vegetation gods, have attempted to emphasise the similarities between the two¹. In particular, according to Così, Telipinu’s disappearance and the resulting interruption of plant and animal fecundity/fertility as narrated in the myth characterise the god as a “genio della fecondità’ soggetto a ritmi alternati di presenza e assenza”². It is precisely this dimension of absence-presence that makes him a “dio in vicenda”³. More specifically, he is a “mystical god” inasmuch as “la sua vicenda mitica interferisce con il piano della reale esperienza umana: la sua scomparsa provoca la siccità, il suo ritorno riporta alla vita”⁴. As for the ritual aspect of the cult of Telipinu, it is a “celebrazione periodica, di interesse pub-

¹ For the relevant bibliography cf. Polvani 2001, pp. 63-64. Così, whose opinion is discussed next, says that these scholars (whose names he does not mention, however) have pointed out the typological similarities between the two characters “usando, in assenza di specifiche competenze filologiche e archeologiche, le traduzioni e i repertori d’uso comune” (Così 1982, p. 494). But those who have adopted these approaches include scholars of the calibre of Gaster and Gusmani, whom it is difficult to accuse of philological incompetence.

² Così 1982, p. 494.

³ On the use of this definition for certain mythical characters and their inclusion within a specific typology cf. Bianchi 1965; 1982, pp. 1-15 and 917-930, and elsewhere in this vast work. For a critical discussion of this methodology cf. Autori Vari 2001 and ch. 4.4 in the present book.

⁴ Così 1982, p. 494.

blico e collettivo, volta ad assicurare la prosperità e la fecondità dei campi”⁵.

Così continues his detailed examination, inspired by the thesis of “alcuni studiosi” (not further specified) according to whom Telipinu, during his absence, was imagined to be “dead”. Based on this theory he further proposes the hypothesis that “tale ‘morte’, una volta intesa come morte reale del dio invece che come rappresentazione della sua assenza, possa essere stata collegata nei rituali alla morte reale di ogni singolo uomo”⁶. Finally, the discovery of Telipinu by a bee who stings him and covers his eyes with wax and honey is to be interpreted in the sense of awakening the dead, smeared with wax and honey to prevent the body corrupting. Some continuity between ancient Anatolian and Hittite beliefs and the whole of the mythical and ritual traditions about Attis is perhaps present in the ritual documented by Firmicus Maternus⁷ concerning the death and resurrection of a god that includes the anointing of the throats of the faithful and the mention by Sallust⁸ of a sacred meal eaten by the devotees of Attis that, according to some scholars⁹, comprised a mixture of milk and honey¹⁰.

In the present state of our knowledge, Così’s argument is questionable from many aspects. First of all, as Così himself notes, the documentation on Attis that he presents in support of his theory is susceptible to more than one interpretation¹¹. Also, recent studies have conclusively identified the god of the ritual recorded by Firmicus Maternus as Osiris¹²; the mixture of milk and honey that the devotees of Attis are supposed to have eaten is not attested as such in any source and is thus considered a conjecture¹³.

⁵ *Id.*, p. 495.

⁶ *Id.*, p. 496.

⁷ Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. rel.* XXII 1.

⁸ Sall., *De diis et mundo* IV.

⁹ Cf. Così 1982, p. 492 and n. 22.

¹⁰ “Ho ipotizzato l’esistenza nel mondo anatolico e in quello ittita, che solo presuntivamente hanno dato origine alla figura di Attis, di idee e di dottrine relative al superamento della morte attraverso la conservazione del cadavere, idee che possono forse essersi concretizzate in istituzioni rituali comportanti a questo scopo l’uso del miele (...). Ora, i testi di epoca imperiale sicuramente o solo ipoteticamente riferiti al culto di Attis, che fanno riferimento ad unzioni e a pasti sacri che avrebbero come strumento o come ingrediente il miele, alludono forse a queste antichissime credenze?”, Così 1982, p. 498.

¹¹ Cf. his comments on the decorations from Çatal Hüyük, Così 1982, p. 496.

¹² Cf. Podeman Sørensen 1989b.

The interpretation of Telipinu and his myth proposed by Cosi is unmistakably linked to the “typological” distinction – first proposed by U. Bianchi and adopted by his students – between the categories of “mystic religion”, “mystery religion” and “mysteriosophy”¹⁴. The adoption of this hermeneutical model, however, determines a whole apriori approach to the character of Telipinu that is especially obvious in the definition of him as a “genio della fecondità”¹⁵ and in the concept of “presence-absence” discussed below.

According to Cosi, Telipinu must be considered a “mystic god”, since what happened to him had a profound effect on the human level. Here he seems to undervalue that the dimension in which the story of Telipinu occurs is “mythical time” and the mankind that acts there, even though it suffers just like mankind now, is also “mythical”. No special interference between the divine and human planes emerges that would allow Telipinu to be spoken of as a “mystic god”¹⁶ to differentiate him from Zeus, for example, who after the nasty trick Prometheus played on him, deprived men (equally “mythical”) of fire. If by “interference” between the divine and human levels is meant instead the presence of a “reactualizing” rite, then it is legitimate to extend immeasurably the category of “mystic gods”, and make it include practically all the deities involved in mythical events connected with ritual practices¹⁷.

However, the image of Telipinu as outlined in the most recent and accredited studies on his myth removes him completely from the strictly naturalistic context¹⁸. In fact the myth in question goes back to the wider realm of myths about a “disappearing god” that in the Hittite world involve various deities (Telipinu, but also the storm-god; the Sun god, the goddess Hannahanna; the goddesses Anzili and Zukki; the goddess Inara)¹⁹. Three versions of it are documented, though they

¹³ Also extremely hypothetical is the interpretation of the images in one of the rooms of Çatal Hüyük (flowers, bees, butterflies or chrysalids, wax- and honeycombs, beehive) in reference to death and rebirth (Cosi 1982, pp. 496-497).

¹⁴ For these categories cf. ch. 4.4.

¹⁵ In a note Cosi states that in part he wishes to accept Frazer’s classification.

¹⁶ I intentionally do not refer to the problem of the legitimate use of the term “mystic” in the meaning proposed here by Cosi.

¹⁷ On the difficulties felt by many scholars in accepting Bianchi’s definition of a “dio mistico” cf. the closing discussion in Bianchi – Vermaseren 1982, pp. 883-915.

¹⁸ I refer in particular to the works of A.M. Polvani, cf. Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, pp. 71-89; Polvani 2001; Polvani 2001a (with previous bibliography).

¹⁹ Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990; Polvani 2001; it seems that these myths were given the specific name of *mugawar* / *mugeššar*.

should not be fused into a single account as is often done²⁰. As has been correctly emphasised, this absence is to be understood not so much as a disappearance but as a concealment of Telipinu, that takes place on this earth and not in the Netherworld²¹. In addition, his disappearance entails very serious consequences *for the whole cosmos* that fit badly into an interpretation of the myth in a seasonal sense. The critical situation that ensues is described as chaotic and disordered not only at the natural level but also at social and political levels²². Thus Telipinu is neither “genio della fertilità” nor “dio in vicenda”. In this myth he has instead, according to Polvani, “i caratteri di una divinità complessa, riassumendo in sé la funzione di dio della fertilità, di dio della tempesta e di protettore della famiglia reale, in definitiva, di tutto il paese”²³.

As for the motif of the bee, according to Cusi’s interpretation, the insect’s function in myth was to awaken the dead god, and its application of wax and honey to Telipinu is to be seen as an allusion to the practices of preserving corpses²⁴.

First of all, it must be stressed that the three versions of the myth present different situations: in the first version the broken condition of the text does not tell us what result the bee’s intervention had, but very probably its intervention, like those of the eagles and other deities, was destined to fail. Only the intervention of the “Man of the Storm God”, in fact, through a suitable ritual, allows a happy ending to the affair²⁵. It is interesting to note that in the second and third versions, the insect’s sting not only “reawakens” Telipinu but makes him angry. This episode can be better understood if it is remembered that the god’s anger and his resulting removal from the divine and human assembly remain unknown to gods and men²⁶, and thus the activation of a strategy suitable to overcome the crisis occurs only by trial and error. The bee sting could thus have been used to make the god angry once again, but this time an obvious reason for his anger was created that humans could readily understand. This provides the possibility of setting in motion a suitable intervention to neutralise his anger.

²⁰ See Polvani’s comments in Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, pp. 72-73.

²¹ Polvani 2001a.

²² Here I again take up Polvani’s comments in Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, p. 76 and in Polvani 2001.

²³ Polvani in Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, p. 78.

²⁴ Apart from anything else, the fact that in the myth the awakening sting precedes the supposed “embalming” practices is inconsistent.

²⁵ Polvani in Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, p. 77.

²⁶ *Ead.*, p. 73 n. 4.

Lastly, the initial “fault” that causes the overturning of order is, very probably, a violation by the king. The surmounting of this violation is documented by the reference, in the final part of the myth, to the benevolence of the deity towards the rulers: “Con l’esito positivo del rituale, e il ritorno della divinità, si ha la ricostruzione di quell’ordine, di quell’equilibrio, di quel benessere che era stato sovvertito. Infatti se la colpa è stata commessa dal re, ben si comprende la gravità della situazione, in quanto il re rappresenta da una parte l’intero paese e dall’altra la divinità stessa sulla terra”²⁷.

In the light of these considerations it is clearly difficult, to make a comparison between the mythological tradition²⁸ about Telipinu’s “absence” and the tradition about the death of Attis in terms of fertility and of “mysticism”.

Scholars saw another possible element of continuity with previous Anatolian religious traditions in the person of Agdistis who, in the “Phrygian” version, is described as being androgynous even if, in the course of events, he later loses his own virility.

Gusmani had proposed the hypothesis that the character in question was an ancient Phrygian deity distinguished precisely by androgyny²⁹. In an analysis of the list of deities in Kizzuwatna, where there is a link between Kubaba and Adamma, Fauth³⁰ was convinced that Adamma was a *Lallbezeichnung* composed of the words “father” and “mother”. It would then be a deity with androgynous features that, when Kubaba entered Anatolia, was reinterpreted as an epiclesis of the *Muttergottheit*. The mention in Rhamnous of a priestly office called “adamma” in the sanctuary of Agdistis was considered by Fauth as a further proof of his thesis³¹.

In short, a connection was thus established between the androgynous Agdistis in the “Phrygian” version, an ancient Phrygian god whose name was probably Andistis, and Adamma, who was also an ancient Anatolian figure with androgynous features³². According to

²⁷ *Ead.*, p. 78 but in particular cf. Polvani 2001.

²⁸ And of course the related rituals.

²⁹ Gusmani 1959.

³⁰ Fauth 1967 and 1977.

³¹ The inscription was first published by Rhomaïos 1928 and later included in Roussel 1930 and Pouilloux 1954.

³² This seems to be Cosi’s position when he states: “L’*adamma* che troviamo a Ramnunte potrebbe in conclusione essere un titolo sacerdotale femminile legato piuttosto che ad Attis ad Agdistis/Cibele/Kubaba, portato in Attica da mercenari che l’hanno mantenuto, come epiteto della dea, dalle antichità anatoliche” (Cosi 1975-1976, p. 154).

present knowledge, the hypothesis of the androgyny of Adamma can no longer be proposed. She was a goddess in her own right and not an attribute or manifestation of Kubaba, from whom she was clearly distinct, with unequivocally feminine characteristics³³. Thus the reference to a previous androgynous figure of which a trace remained in the Agdistis of the “Phrygian” myth can be only perhaps a rather implausible hypothesis, since any documentary proof is lacking.

Parallels to the episode narrated in the “Phrygian” version, in particular to the part concerning the birth of Agdistis and his castration, have been hypothetically detected in the Hittite myth of the so-called *Song of Ullikummi* and in a Caucasian legend on the mythical people of Narti, that belongs to oral tradition, collected and published at the beginning of the previous century³⁴. The first scholar to propose these parallels was W. Burkert³⁵, but they have been adopted in part also by other scholars³⁶. Above all, in Hittite and “Phrygian” myths, both protagonists, Ullikummi and Agdistis, are born from an immense rock following its fecundation by a deity (Kumarbi and Zeus). In the Caucasian legend, instead, a stone is impregnated by a shepherd filled with lust at the sight of the beautiful Saetaenae, the heroine of other stories in the cycle of the Narti. From the stone the hero Soslan/Sosriko was born. The bellicose and uncontrollable character of Agdistis is comparable to that of Ullikummi. The former is castrated; the latter, instead has the soles of his feet cut off to separate him from the giant Upelluri to whom he is attached; lastly, Soslan’s legs are broken, the only weak part of an otherwise invincible body.

It is not superfluous to note that, from a religio-historical point of view, it is important to establish, in the study of possible parallels, whether the similarities of mythical motifs or ritual elements found in different cultures, correspond to similar *meanings and functions*. In the case of the parallels proposed by Burkert, there are as many – if not more – differences as similarities. To this must be added the fact that the material concerning Attis has been derived partly from the ver-

³³ For proof of the argument summarised here and all the bibliographical references cf. Xella 1999a and Lancellotti 1999.

³⁴ The relationship between the ancient myth and the Caucasian tradition would be justified historically from the fact that the *Song of Ullikummi* has Hurrian features. However, it should be emphasised that, with our present knowledge, it is not possible to reconstruct the myth in its original Hurrian version, cf. Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, pp. 142-150.

³⁵ Burkert 1979a.

³⁶ Cf. Mora 1994, pp. 117-120; Borgeaud 1996, pp. 75-76; Roller 1999, p. 248.

sion in Pausanias and partly from the one in Arnobius: to juxtapose them in order to derive a common structure from them both thus seems to be a risky venture.

As has been said, comparing mythical narratives brings to light considerable differences: in the Hittite myth³⁷, Ullikummi's birth fits into Kumarbi's elaborate plan to dethrone the king of heaven, the storm-god. In fact, Kumarbi decides to create a being that opposes the storm-god and for that reason is united with an enormous rock, impregnating it. At the birth of the child, which is made of diorite, he is placed on Kumarbi's knees, who acknowledges him as a son. Placed on the shoulders of the giant Upelluri, in the sea, he grows immeasurably until he emerges from the water and reaches the sky. Though enormous, Ullikummi is deaf and blind. Next, with the knife that separated the sky from the earth, he is removed from the giant's shoulders and faces the storm-god in battle. The story has no ending but, presumably, it must have concluded with the victory of the storm-god.

The cosmogonic vision underlying this myth has been stressed, and particularly important is the use of the knife that severed the sky from the earth, marking the passage from the chaotic situation of primeval time to the present order³⁸.

The Ullikummi episode could support this event by emphasising how it is not possible to go back to the chaotic dimensions of the origins. Kumarbi's rebellious attempt is in fact destined to fail because it aims at regaining, in an ordered world, "mythical" time, the period in which reality must still be based³⁹. Ullikummi is therefore an "impossible being" in that both ontologically – he is the son of a divine and an earthly element – and spatially – he is positioned between earth and the sky – he carries out a union between the human and the divine feasible only in the time of myth. As long as he remains anchored to the earth, through the giant Upelluri, he is in this primeval "mythical" dimension and thus cannot be defeated. Separation from the giant's shoulders, however, allows him to be acted upon and defeated.

As for the "Phrygian" tradition about Attis, it can be noted that the

³⁷ See the account in Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, pp. 150-162.

³⁸ Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, p. 150.

³⁹ It is precisely in mythical time that those events occur which will result in its present form.

birth of Agdistis from Mount Agdos is present only in the version recorded by Arnobius, whereas it is missing from the one in Pausanias, where the androgyne is the result of Zeus fertilising the earth. Furthermore, in the version in Pausanias, there is no trace of Agdistis having an aggressive attitude, a motif that occurs instead in the version in Arnobius, where it says that Agdistis cares neither for gods nor for men. But, apart from the differences between the two accounts, what makes it impossible to compare that tradition with the myth of Ullikummi is that the mythical accounts have different functions. If in the Hittite myth, as has been noted above, the Ullikummi episode is used to confirm the legitimacy of the present cosmic order, the castration of Agdistis serves, instead, to make the birth of Attis even more remote and different from the normal generative process. At the same time, an attempt is made to retain a “strong” link with the deity and this is made possible through the paradox of the “fatherhood” of Agdistis. However, even this paternity is not represented by direct filiation but with the daughter of the river Sangarius as intermediary. Thus Attis is born from a father who is not a father, either because Agdistis had no direct relationship with his son or because, due to the castration, he becomes in fact a “mother”. It is difficult to interpret the castration of Agdistis, as has been attempted⁴⁰, in the sense of “normalisation” since, as is evident from the version in Pausanias, he/she continues to retain ambiguous sexual elements even after the mutilation⁴¹.

In Pausanias Agdistis is the son of Zeus and the earth (Ge). Pausanias defines him as *daimon*, stressing his characteristics of mediator between the divine and human worlds⁴². He acts as a hinge between those two dimensions, unlike Attis who, even with his miraculous birth, to all intents and purposes, belongs to the earthly world.

Even the parallel proposed by Roller⁴³ between the birth of Agdis-

⁴⁰ Cf. Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 41: “Agdistis, born from a rock or from the earth, is a divine being expressing the savage violence of the forces of nature, unbounded and uncontrolled. While the mutilation of this hermaphroditic figure defines her nature by concentrating and normalising her fertilising capacities in a manner which is no longer destructive and unbridled, it gives rise at the same time to a vegetal element typically charged with a vital force”.

⁴¹ Cf. Mora 1994, pp. 122-123; Borgeaud 1996, pp. 85-86, based on the interpretation of Pellizer 1982, pp. 134-135 and pp. 138-139.

⁴² Cf. the similarities with Ma(s)nes, grandfather of Atys in the genealogy recorded by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (I 27, 1-2), and father of Atys in the genealogy recorded by Herodotus I 94.

tis from the stone/earth and the myth of Kumarbi is based on a conjecture that recent studies of the Hittite myth have shown to be inconsistent⁴⁴. In the myth in question, Anu's sperm – which Kumarbi finds in his mouth after emasculating him with a bite and makes him pregnant – is spat out by Kumarbi. There follows immediately a reference to Mount Ganzura, that has led scholars to hold that the mountain, made pregnant by the sperm, gave birth to other deities. But this passage is missing from the text and as Mount Ganzura in Hittite mythical tradition appears as the residence and refuge of gods, “è più probabile che Kumarbi si rifugi là per riprendersi da ciò che gli è accaduto”⁴⁵.

Borgeaud proposes instead a parallel between the “Phrygian” version (Arnobius) of the Attis myth and the Hittite myth of Illuyankas. The similarities between the two accounts lie in connection with the episode of drunkenness and subsequent immobilisation by binding. In the myth of Illuyankas, it is Hupašiya who ties up the dragon, made drunk by the goddess Inara. Hupašiya is portrayed as an ordinary mortal in the myth, so that he is only allowed to immobilise the divine monster, who instead will be killed by the storm-god. In the case of Agdistis, the drunkenness and immobilisation are decreed by a divine assembly and carried out by the god Liber. But the most significant difference between the two accounts, which is in any case stressed by Borgeaud himself, is that drunkenness and binding do not have the same consequences. In fact, in the case of Illuyankas, they lead not to castration but to the death of the monster⁴⁶.

At the close of this rapid analysis of supposed Anatolian antecedents to the mythical tradition about Attis, one can only agree with the remarks made by Borgeaud, according to whom “nous devons nous contenter de reconnaître que certains éléments narratifs présents dans la mythologie anatolienne du II^e millénaire se retrouvent à la fois dans le mythe grec de la succession des souverainetés divines, dans certaines traditions relatives à Typhon, et dans l'épisode concernant la génération d'Agdistis dans le mythe pessiontien rapporté par Pausanias et Arnobe. Ce qui circule et se

⁴³ Roller 1999, p. 248.

⁴⁴ Now known as *Heavenly Kingship* or *Theogony*, its name in Hittite was “Song [of ...]”, cf. Pecchioli Daddi in Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, pp. 115-131.

⁴⁵ Pecchioli Daddi in Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, p. 131 n. 22.

⁴⁶ Borgeaud 1996, p. 76.

transmet apparaît ainsi comme un ensemble de motifs indépendants des systèmes de pensée. Dans ce sens, on préférera parler d'une mémoire éclatée⁴⁷.

In conclusion, while accepting that certain motifs and assonances present in the various mythical accounts can be derived from an older collection of traditions, the revision process of the motifs and the change of function which these traditions have undergone have resulted, in this case, in their taking on different meanings in the different contexts in which they have been welcomed.

2.2. *Royal genealogies in ancient Lydia*

Ancient Anatolian mythology, therefore, has transmitted only isolated motifs and elements, which could be connected to the latter traditions about Attis only indirectly, not within an organic framework. As matters stand, a more solid foundation for further research can be provided by a set of historical or pseudo-historical witnesses concerning Lydia and Phrygia. These I propose to examine in the following paragraphs, starting with Lydia.

It is well known that Lydia⁴⁸ had an extremely important role as both bridge and filter between the traditions of Asia Minor and the Greek world⁴⁹. Particularly active in this respect was the dynasty of the Mermnades, who ruled in Lydia between 680 and 547 BCE.

Herodotus provides information about Lydia in this period in Book I of his *Histories*, which include the first literary references to Attis/Atys. Scholars dealing with this topic have focused their attention chiefly, and sometimes in a rather superficial way, on Atys the son of Croesus, and in my opinion they have neglected those passages, where Herodotus makes Atys an ancient king, that were written in the period when the throne of Lydia passed from the Heraclid dynasty to the Mermnads.

The evidence provided by the Greek historian is worth examining with the closest attention since Herodotus is indeed the oldest classical source on Atys, and the royal genealogy he mentions seems to belong to a tradition formulated in Lydia precisely in the 7th cent. BCE.

⁴⁷ *Id.*, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁸ For a succinct but accurate summary of the ancient history of Phrygia and Lydia cf. Mellink 1991.

Including this evidence in the dossier on Attis has significant implications: why was a castrated god – if Attis was already considered a god in Phrygia, or a eunuch priest, if the “god Attis” is a later invention – given a key role in the royal genealogy of Lydia? More detailed analysis of the source in question in all its variant forms may perhaps help to provide an answer to these questions.

According to the evidence from Herodotus, then, the first rulers of Lydia were descended from Lydos, son of Atys⁵⁰. In another passage, Herodotus describes Atys, son of Manes, as the king of the Lydians. After a famine, Atys decided to divide his people into two groups and to determine by lot who was to leave their native land. The group of emigrants was led out of the country by his son Tyrrhenos (the eponym of the Tyrrhenians) while those who stayed were under the sceptre of Atys⁵¹.

There are other variants of the list: Dionysius of Halicarnassus records two different genealogies for Tyrrhenos, the eponym of the Tyrrhenians. In the first, for which he gives no source, Atys is only fourth in the genealogical list, the line of succession is: Zeus-Masnes-Kotys-Atys-Lydos, and Tyrrhenos⁵². The second genealogy, instead, is attributed to Herodotus⁵³. Next, Dionysius mentions a list that goes back to Xanthos of Lydia, where the dynastic sequence Atys-Lydos-Torebos occurs⁵⁴. Yet another genealogical list is given by Nicolaus of Damascus, according to whom the sequence is Zeus-Karios-Manes-Atys-Torrhebos⁵⁵. In addition, it should not be forgotten that in

⁴⁹ Cf. Dunbabin 1957, pp. 62-71; Mazzarino 1989, pp. 171-187; Burkert 1995 and 1998; Borgeaud 1996, pp. 19-27; Baldriga 1997. On the more general topic of the influence of the ancient Near Eastern world on Greek religion cf. most recently Ribichini – Rocchi – Xella 2001; on “syncretism” cf. Bonnet – Motte 1999, two collective volumes which contain specific articles on the various regions of the area around the Mediterranean, reflections on methodology and references to the extensive previous bibliography.

⁵⁰ Herod., I 7.

⁵¹ Herod., I 94. To be precise, in this passage there is no mention of the son Lydos, and the people over whom Atys rules is already called “Lydian”. Probably, here Herodotus does not consider it necessary to repeat what he had already written at the beginning of the book about the ethnicon and its origin.

⁵² Dion. Halic., I 27, 1-2.

⁵³ Dion. Halic. I 27, 3-4. This list (Manes-Atys-Tyrrhenos and Lydos) does not match any of those recorded by Herodotus. Briquel 1991, pp. 91ff., has put forward the hypothesis that it is the result of combining different passages from Herodotus (I 7; I 94; VII 7). This combination would go back to the end of the 5th/beginning of the 4th cent. BCE. Cf. also Fromentin 1998, pp. 241-242.

⁵⁴ FGrHist 765 F 16 (= Dion. Halic. I 28, 2).

⁵⁵ FGrHist 90 F 15 (= Steph. Byzant. s.v. Τόρρηβος).

another book Herodotus mentions the succession Manes-Kotys-Asios⁵⁶.

This is not the place for discussing the different variants of these lists which correspond to different traditions and political and geographical requirements: what should be emphasised here is that Atys appears in them with full royal dignity⁵⁷.

The list and its variants date to the 5th cent. BCE, but they probably go back to an earlier model. Adopting this view, C. Talamo has attempted to pinpoint the actual historical moment when it was necessary to prepare a list of kings going back to the earliest period of the monarchy, with a line of succession that made the Atyads the mythical Phrygian ancestors of the ruling monarchy in Lydia. In her opinion, the Atyads do not correspond to a real dynasty that actually existed but instead were made up by the Mermnad dynasty⁵⁸. This fabrication happened when the peoples south of the Hermus river – the Lydians – dominated the Maeonians in order to legitimise their power⁵⁹. The upper limit for the compilation of the list would be the 9th cent. BCE⁶⁰ and the lower limit would be the reign of Gyges⁶¹.

The list transmitted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, which is considered the most complete⁶², quotes a series of persons who point unequivocally to Phrygia⁶³. The first name is Masnes⁶⁴, the earliest

⁵⁶ Herod., IV 45.

⁵⁷ On the relationships among the various lists and the reasons inherent in local interests for which certain persons replaced others cf. Talamo 1979, pp. 13-33.

⁵⁸ Cf. Seel 1956; Baldriga 1997, p. 285. On Lydian genealogical lists cf. also Burkert 1995; Asheri 1989, pp. 267-268.

⁵⁹ "I Mermnadi proclamandosi, con la creazione degli Atiadi, discendenti di personaggi mitici frigi, acquistano dignità di casa regnante presso i Lidi, diventano eredi dei re frigi nelle estrazioni minerarie della zona costiera (la presenza della frigia Cibebe nel quartiere di lavorazione dell'oro a Sardis lo conferma) e acquistano quindi, con il controllo dell'oro, la capacità di accentramento dei poteri della monarchia", Talamo 1979, p. 156.

⁶⁰ "I nomi frigi sono penetrati in Lidia certamente dopo la venuta dei Frigi in Asia minore, XII secolo, e con molta probabilità, dopo l'affermarsi di questi sull'altopiano anatolico, il che non è avvenuto prima del IX secolo", Talamo 1979, p. 16.

⁶¹ In the list, *Lydoi* and *Tyrrhenoi* are kept separate, even if they are considered on the same plane. According to Talamo, this would no longer make sense when "Lydia" denoted a single undivided unit, as happened after the reign of Gyges. See Talamo 1979, p. 33.

⁶² Cf. Talamo 1979, p. 15.

⁶³ The names are analysed in Talamo 1979, pp. 16-28, and Baldriga 1997, pp. 280-282.

⁶⁴ This is the original form of the name, whereas the variant Μάνης is the Greek form, cf. Wilamowitz 1899, p. 222.

king, son of Zeus and Ge; from Masnes, Kotys was born and from him, Atys. Various traditions about him are known⁶⁵, among them the tradition derived from Nonnos⁶⁶, according to which Masnes (in the form of Δαμασῆν) is a giant, a son of Earth, living near the banks of the Hermus⁶⁷. There is certainly an allusion to this tradition on two Lydian coins from Sardis, one of Alexander Severus and the other of Gordianus⁶⁸, in whose portrait there are references to the account. While the name that interests us appears on the first coin in the well known form of ΜΑΣΝΗΣ, on the second it is possible to read ΜΑΣΑΝΗΣ⁶⁹. If this was the original form, it is then possible to suggest a connection with the Luwian term *masana* = “god”⁷⁰.

The second person in the list is Kotys. In Thracia it occurs in royal names down to a late period⁷¹. A Thracian deity also has this name, and there were orgiastic rites known as Κοτύτια⁷² in her honour. In this case, though, the character is female, as Kotys is in fact the goddess of the Edonians.

Lastly, Atys the son of Kotys is the father of Lydos. Scholars who have studied the range of the genealogical list have unhesitatingly connected this name with the mythical tradition concerning Attis⁷³.

Scholars have drawn attention to the importance of the list of Atyads in relation to the legitimacy of the new ruling Mermnad dynasty in Lydia. The Mermnads intended to use it in order to mark

⁶⁵ Cf. Gusmani 1960; Talamo 1979, pp. 16-24; Baldriga 1997, pp. 280-281.

⁶⁶ Nonn., XXV vv. 451-552.

⁶⁷ For proof that the reference here is to the the Hermus river that flows through Phrygia, cf. Talamo, pp. 19-22. The account by Xanthos recorded by Pliny, FGrHist 785 F3 (= Plin., *Nat. hist.* 25, 14), also belongs to the same tradition.

⁶⁸ Cf. Head 1901, p. 268 n. 179, pl. XXVII, 12 and *Inv. Wadd.* n. 5274, pl. XIV, 19; Robert 1937, p. 155.

⁶⁹ According to Head 1901, *Introduction*, pp. cxi-cxiii, whereas L. Robert (Robert 1937, pp. 155-158) read ΜΑΣΔΑΝΗΣ (a thesis supported in Robert J. and L. 1962, pp. 201-202). Head's reading is accepted by Gusmani 1960, p. 330.

⁷⁰ An hypothesis already proposed by Laroche 1958, p. 283 and taken up by Gusmani 1960, pp. 332-334. On the Luwian term *massani-/massana-* meaning “god”, cf. Laroche 1954, p. 123 e 1958a, p. 190.

⁷¹ Cf. Talamo 1979, p. 24.

⁷² Aesch., Fr. 57 Radt (pp. 178-180) = Strab., X 3, 16.

⁷³ After noting the frequency of the name in Lydia onomastics, Talamo refers to the two versions of the Attis myth. According to her, they were both already in circulation in the 4th cent. BCE (a date ascribed to the “Lydian” tradition as Pausanias mentions Hermesianax of Colophon, and to the “Phrygian” tradition because of the mention of Timotheus in Arnobius), but she assigns a Lydian origin to the former. Baldriga 1997, p. 282, merely notes that “Atys viene tradizionalmente collegato con la leggenda di Attis”.

themselves out as autonomous and “Phrygian” unlike their predecessors, who instead had invoked a “Mesopotamian” setting, as is attested in the genealogy of the Heraclids⁷⁴.

Analysis of the names that occur in the genealogy of Atyads has gone no further than noting as a common denominator a general Phrygian setting to which, in one way or another, all the persons seem connected. Instead, the difficulty is to determine in precisely what circumstances Phrygian names and myths connected with the list of Atyads could have entered Lydia⁷⁵. In my opinion, this last statement indicates a fundamental problem: why did the Lydians have to use names taken from here and there in order to create the genealogy that was intended to found and give legitimacy to the Mermnad monarchy? I do not consider it sufficient to invoke for each of them an origin or at least a particular emphasis in a Phrygian setting, since there must have been some element that linked them together more closely, thus allowing the compiler(s) of the list to collect them together and present them as a family tree. In my view, this link is the same as the very purpose of the list, that is, the foundation of the new Lydian dynasty from the Phrygian dynasty which was older and therefore had more authority. In fact, in most of the traditions concerned, the persons mentioned in the list of Atyads appear precisely as “mythical kings”, that is, as prototypes of royalty.

As for Ma(s)nes, Plutarch tells us that the Phrygians considered Manes⁷⁶ an ancient king to be so good and powerful that great and wonderful acts were still called *μανικά* in Plutarch’s day, after his name. According to Stephanus of Byzantium, the city of Manesion was founded by Manes⁷⁷. An additional datum, if the reading ΜΑΣΑΝΗΣ on the coin of Gordianus is accepted, would derive from

⁷⁴ On the Heraclids cf. Talamo 1979, pp. 35-56; Mazzarino 1989, pp. 171-187; Vannicelli 2001. Note particularly the presence of the “Mesopotamian” names Ninus and Bel in the list.

⁷⁵ Cf. Talamo 1979, p. 29. Baldriga 1997, p. 285, is also somewhat vague when he states that “quella (*scil.*: the dynasty) degli Atyadi raccoglie un patrimonio onomastico che caratterizza una fase di incertezza etnico-politica segnata, agli occhi di un greco, da una forte presenza dell’elemento frigio”.

⁷⁶ Plut., *De Is. et Os.* 24 (360 B). For the problems concerning the variants Masnes or Masdes recorded by Plutarch cf. the comment *ad loc.* in Gwyn Griffiths 1970, p. 382.

⁷⁷ Steph. Byz. s.v. Μανήσιον. The foundation of Acmonia is ascribed to his son Acmon and from his son Doious comes the name of the Doiantos valley (Steph. Byz. s.v. Ακμονία and Δοίαντος πεδίων).

the fact that the term *Massana-* could be the sovereign's own name, like the Hittite term *dUTU^{si}* ⁷⁸.

With regard to *Kotys*, I consider that here should be taken into account not the evidence from Strabo – who mentions a Thracian goddess whereas in the Lydian genealogical list the kingdom is inherited by males⁷⁹ – but the fact that *Kotys* is a typical Thracian royal name⁸⁰. In addition, like the evidence for *Masnes*, there was a place name in Phrygia derived from the proper name *Kotys* plus the locative ending⁸¹.

Apart from the reference to Phrygia, the connecting thread linking the mythical characters recorded in the list of *Atyads* is undoubtedly their royalty⁸². And yet, in respect of the reference to *Atys*, research has not taken this direction but has been limited to recording the facts regarding the “Phrygian” or “Lydian” version of the myth of which he is the protagonist, but without paying special attention to this way of reading it. Instead, I consider that since the name recurs later in the royal genealogical list of the *Mermnads*⁸³ it is further proof of his royal character. In other words, *Atys* is placed in this list precisely because he is linked with royalty, and more specifically, Phrygian royalty. Just like his predecessors, especially *Masnes*⁸⁴, the role of *Atys* in the list is to be the earliest and prototypical king, yet at the same time, he also has a special role as the father of *Lydos*, the eponym of the *Lydians*. In fact, one could say that, from the point of view of the *Lydians* who compiled the list, *Atys* is the connecting link between “Phrygian” and “Lydian” royalty, in a genealogical *continuum* determined by the fact that power passed uninterruptedly from father to son.

⁷⁸ Cf. Gusmani 1960, p. 333. This prescinds from whether or not one accepts the historical reconstruction for Lydia in the 12th cent. BCE as proposed by Gusmani. Adopting a thesis of Bossert, he suggests that in the 2nd millennium BCE, Lydia was under the control of Luwian elements and that the period coincided with the *Atyad* dynasty. On the development of a solar theology among the Hittites for the foundation of the monarchy cf. Archi 1979; on the similarity between the iconography of the “Sun god” and the Hittite king cf. Güterbock 1993.

⁷⁹ Dion. Halic., I 27, also records the name *Halia*, the wife of *Kotys*.

⁸⁰ Cf. Volkmann 1969, who provides all the information.

⁸¹ Steph. Byz., s.v. Κοτιάειον. For an analysis of toponyms in Asia Minor cf. Zgusta 1984; Frei 1988 and 1990.

⁸² It is of course implicit in that they are included in the list, but it is important to discover the background that determined this choice.

⁸³ Besides *Atys*, the son of *Croesus*, there are the composite names *Adyattes* and *Sadyattes*; cf. Gow 1960, p. 92 n. 29.

⁸⁴ Note that in I 94, Herodotus makes *Atys* a direct descendant of *Ma(s)nes*.

From this there emerges a fact with extremely important implications: if the “Phrygian” version of the myth were the older, it would then be necessary to think that the Lydians chose as the “father” of their eponymous ancestor (i.e. Lydos) a castrated god who died before getting married⁸⁵. However, paradoxical as it may seem, the very name Atys, and its various Hellenised forms⁸⁶, in fact means “father” in Phrygian⁸⁷. Accordingly, it seems to be an ancient and original attribute of this character that persists even in later periods when Atys was ascribed attributes even opposed to or at least irreconcilable with the nature and functions of a king⁸⁸.

If, as is apparent from Herodotus, the royal prerogatives ascribed to Attis were already characteristic of him in one of his earlier attestations, the next stage in our research is then to verify where these prerogatives also occur in other sources.

⁸⁵ On the other hand, the problem is not eliminated if one accepts the theory of Borgeaud that Atys was considered in Anatolia and in the period before its “Hellenisation” as a lover-priest of the Great Mother. In this case also it would be difficult to explain the Lydian “choice” of including in the Lydian dynasty a name that, in Phrygia, qualified a priestly function. On this problem cf. *infra*.

⁸⁶ It belongs to the class of Phrygian *Lalnamen*, on which cf. Innocente 1997, pp. 37-38. For the spread of the name in Asia Minor cf. Zgusta 1964, c. 119. The term (1) *á-ta-na* / (2) *á-t[a]i-na*, which occurs in the same context as Kubaba on stelae in hieroglyphic Hittite from Tell-Aḫmar (1) and Aleppo (2) respectively is very enigmatic, which could also be a divine epithet (a noun or adjective) in the sense of “youth”, “son” (cf. Hawkins 1980, esp. p. 146; there is no new information in the new edition by Hawkins, 2000, 224ff.; cf. esp. p. 372). I wish to thank Massimo Poetto, who kindly indicated to me that there is a new reference to this term in an inscription from Ançoz that he is about to re-publish. If there are links of some kind with Atys/Attis, the question remains open, but given the scarcity of sources, any evidence, even hypothetical, must be noted and evaluated, as we await further information.

⁸⁷ Cf. the comments by E. Benveniste on the term *atta* and its variants, in Benveniste 1969, pp. 209-212; Brixhe – Drew-Bear, 1982 pp. 64-87, p. 70 and pp. 83-84. Varinlioglu 1991, p. 36, puts forward the hypothesis that this term could be “a word which belonged to the cultural substratum of the prehistoric peoples, who used the same word for father as the fertilizing element (i.e. water)”. In the report by Diodorus Siculus (III 58, 4) it is stated explicitly that Attis ὕστερον δ’ ἐπικληθέντα Πάπαν, and the names Παπας and Παπιας “se rattachent à un hypocoristique du nom du père” (Drew-Bear – Naour 1990, p. 2018; cf. also Brixhe – Drew-Bear 1982, p. 83 n. 45).

⁸⁸ Arnobius no longer understood the original meaning of the name and resorts to other etymologies: *Quoniam Lydia scitulos sic vocat, uel quia hirquos Phryges suis attagos elocutionis nuncupant, inde Attis nomen sortiretur effluxit* (Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 6). It is possible that the custom in Lydia of calling handsome young men “Attis” is proof of the reverse process to the one described by Arnobius, which is that from a mythical young and handsome Attis, the name then became an adjective for good-looking boys (cf. Adonis!).

2.3. *Attis in Phrygia: between kingship and priesthood*

In his *excursus* on the members of the Lydia royal list, Talamo states that Attis is “una figura frigia che, con ogni probabilità non ha precedenti ittiti. Pertanto è esclusa la possibilità che il mito di Attis e il suo passaggio da est verso ovest sia già appartenuto a realtà più arcaiche”⁸⁹. It is a fairly reductionist statement in that it limits to a Hittite setting the possibility of finding “precedents” or comparisons, and implicitly excludes other Anatolian cultures and the rest of the ancient Near Eastern world. If it is true, in fact, that as yet in current research no well-defined “precedent” for Attis has been discovered, the outlook changes if one refers not to an individual Attis, as a specific person, but instead to a model or an ideological domain, the royal domain, to which Attis could have belonged.

From this starting point then it becomes necessary to turn our attention to royalty in the ancient Near East in general and in Anatolia in particular, in the search for possible indications leading us back to a particular type that could in some way represent an antecedent to Attis. In this connection, the role of the Phrygian king⁹⁰ as high priest in the service of a great goddess⁹¹ has been suitably emphasised, a characteristic that Phrygia shares, *mutatis mutandis*, with other ancient Near Eastern cultures, from Mesopotamia to Phoenicia. But it is particularly interesting to note that an important cultic role for the king and the royal family is already well attested in the Hittite world⁹². Certain archaeological finds in Anatolia, even if not easy to interpret, do suggest the existence of that special connection between dynasty and goddess which goes under the name of *hierogamy* (sacred marriage)⁹³. Without wish-

⁸⁹ Talamo 1979, p. 28, who takes up an hypothesis of R. Barnett (cf. Barnett 1956, p. 221 and 1960, p. 144).

⁹⁰ The monarchy in Phrygia must go back to at least the 9th cent. BCE (king Midas in that tradition must have been the fourth king of the dynasty), cf. Muscarella 1995.

⁹¹ Cf. Roller 1999, p. 246. On Midas cf. Roller 1999, p. 246 and more generally, p. 252.

⁹² Cf. for example prince (and later king) Telipinu, priest at Kumanni, on which cf. Archi 1975; Virgilio 1981; p. 61 and n. 103; Boffo 1987, pp. 17-27.

⁹³ The evidence comprises two vases, one found at Inandiktepe and the other at Bitik, on which it is possible to make out a scene of “sacred marriage”, on the meaning of which it is not possible to say anything. On these vases cf. Özgüç T. 1957, p. 62 and 1988, pp. 84-106. On the significance of the belts found in Phrygian aristocratic burials, Vassileva 2001 states that “it is probable better to assume that the belt of a virgin goddess occurs in the royal aristocratic burial as a sign of the sacred marriage

ing to claim too much from this sondage, it seems convenient to try to investigate this aspect further, and glean what one can from the pertinent documentary evidence.

In Hittite myth, the foundation of a prototype monarchy based on a goddess conferring the kingdom on a king is clearly to be found in the episode of Hupašiya, and it also exhibits interesting similarities with some of the mythical traditions about Attis⁹⁴. The episode in question occurs as part of the famous *Myth of Illuyankas*. It tells how the storm-god is defeated by the dragon Illuyankas and remains separated from the other gods. However, he is assisted by his daughter Inara who, with the assistance of a human being called Hupašiya, destroys the monster and its sons. In exchange for helping Inara, Hupašiya claims intercourse with the goddess, which he is permitted. At the end of the venture, Inara builds a “house on a rock” (= royal palace) in which she installs Hupašiya. He must never look out of the window as he is forbidden to see his wife and children. But Hupašiya disregards the prohibition with dramatic consequences: the house is destroyed and the man is killed. Inara entrusts her house to the Hittite king and this event is ratified by the first celebration of the *purulli* festival (New Year Festival).

It has been correctly suggested that this episode should be read in kingship terms: Inara, known as a goddess who protects kingship⁹⁵, chooses Hupašiya from all human beings. Although he is a man, he has the typical characteristics of the model king: heroism and sacredness⁹⁶. But the exclusive union between a man, however special, and a goddess is only feasible at the level of myth. In the episode described, Hupašiya’s infringement of the ban imposed by the goddess forms the foundation of the existing monarchy: the historical Hittite king replaces the unfortunate Hupašiya, a prototypical king and thus “extreme” or at least unsuitable⁹⁷.

The exercise of historical kingship envisages the existence of an

of the king with the goddess, though no direct evidence for such a ritual exist” (p. 60). According to Vassileva “(...) the belt from the Phrygian tumuli would mark the ritual status of the deceased, directly related to his role in the Great Mother’s cult. The possibility of a priestess cannot be ruled out in the case of the Bayındır burial” (*ibid.*). In conclusion: “Indirect evidence could possibly suggest that the Phrygian king was the goddess’ lover/husband at a certain ritual stage” (p. 61).

⁹⁴ On the myth of Hupašiya cf. Pecchioli-Daddi – Polvani 1990, pp. 39ff.

⁹⁵ Cf. Kammenhuber 1976a.

⁹⁶ Cf. Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, p. 43.

⁹⁷ On the “extreme” characteristics of heroes cf., for example, Brelich 1958, *passim*.

unbridgeable chasm between the human and divine levels, but also the possibility of a relationship between these two dimensions. However, this relationship must be regulated through ritual links, not those that are passionate/sexual⁹⁸ or reproductive⁹⁹.

An exclusive and destructive relationship is also set up between Attis and Agdistis/the Great Mother. The theme of “excess” is present both in the “Lydian” version, where it is Zeus who ends the relationship, and in the “Phrygian” version, where it is Attis himself, but provoked by the goddess, who commits suicide by self emasculation. In the latter case the myth serves as the foundation for the “correct” relationship between the Great Mother and the Galli: not an “amorous” relationship no longer based on passionate/sexual accord, as happens for Attis, but an action that takes place through a specific ritual practice. Thus, the relationship of royal family/goddess appears to be a connecting thread between the ancient Hittite world with the Phrygian.

However, epigraphic and archaeological evidence does not provide any explicit indication of the existence of a cult or at least of the divine nature of Attis in Phrygia in periods prior to his appearance in Greece (4th cent. BCE). In 1977, in his monograph on Cybele and Attis, Vermaseren closed the chapter on Asia Minor with the following disconsolate words: “much concerning Cybele and Attis in their mother country still remains a closed book”¹⁰⁰. However, progress achieved in language studies over the last twenty years in the decipherment of Old and New Phrygian and in archaeological excavations in Phrygia now enable the “Attis problem” to be considered from a different perspective¹⁰¹.

The name Attis is quite widespread in Phrygia, even if many of its occurrences in religious contexts suggest that he was someone at the summit of the powerful class, perhaps even the king himself, to whom, in continuation of Hittite traditions, were entrusted the highest religious responsibilities. Later, this name shifted to indicate a priestly charge or at least an “attendant of the sacred”, even if it is difficult to evaluate the nature of the cults that involve the name of Attis

⁹⁸ Cf. Piccaluga 1974, pp. 9-35.

⁹⁹ Hupašiya must not “see” his wife and children outside the “house”; for the mythical king they do not exist.

¹⁰⁰ Vermaseren 1977, p. 24.

¹⁰¹ For an introduction to the vast bibliography on Phrygian language and culture cf. the two surveys, Innocente 1995 and Innocente 1997a.

(in the Old Phrygian variant form “Ates”)¹⁰². The name is inscribed in pottery found in tumulus D near Bayındır (Lycia) in an unmistakable funerary context¹⁰³. This name and its variants also occur in other documents between the “city of Midas” (Yazılıkaya) and its region, and Gordion¹⁰⁴. An Anatolian goddess (a sort of “Great Mother”) also appears in connection with these funerary structures¹⁰⁵. Confirmation

¹⁰² For example, cf. the inscriptions from Çepni (Brixhe – Drew-Bear 1982): in the first, *Ates* is the dedicator, whereas the indirect recipient is *Agamoi* (dat.) (p. 73). The editors perceive in this inscription a structure similar to those in other known dedications, especially the one on the so-called “Tomb of Midas” (*ibid.*). There are more complex problems in interpreting the second inscription, since there the recipient is one *Atai* (dat.) whereas the dedicator is *Atoios* – a name unattested elsewhere, although it seems to be derived from the same root *Atas/Ates* (p. 84). It is immediately preceded by what is probably a determinative, in the genitive: *Atevo* (pp. 85–86). The reading, therefore, is: “Atoios, son of Ates”. The inscription as a whole is a dedication to Ates by Atoios the son of Ates. Brixhe and Drew-Bear date the inscriptions between the 7th and 6th cents. BCE. The parallels that can be found with the inscriptions on the rock façades and the altars indicate that they are in a religious context. This seems to be confirmed by the actual content of the inscriptions which comprise a dedication together with a ritual formula (p. 87). It should be added that Brixhe and Drew-Bear consider the names in the inscriptions to refer to Attis; for a different interpretation cf. *infra*. Cf. also the inscriptions from Tyana (Varinlioğlu 1985; Brixhe 1991; Vassileva 1992).

¹⁰³ Cf. Varinlioğlu 1992. Several containers have the inscription ATES and one graffito has the form ATA. In addition, according to Vassileva, who explains the upward pointing arrow as a T, inscription no. 7 must be readed *Ates*. If accepted, this interpretation would involve a revision of inscriptions where that sign occurs (Vassileva 1997, pp. 268–269).

¹⁰⁴ Vassileva 1997, p. 268. The occurrence of the name on grave goods suggests that it is not simply a personal name even if, of course, that hypothesis cannot be used as proof. On the ceremonial setting for the deposit of vases in the chambers of Phrygian tombs, cf. Mellink 1993, p. 297; Vassileva 1997, p. 269. Also in the realm of hypothesis is the interpretation of names on the containers of Bayındır with reference to “mystical cults” (cf. Varinlioğlu 1992, pp. 16–17; Vassileva 1997, p. 269). On the presumed existence of “Phrygian mysteries” in Asia Minor from the 7th–6th cents. BCE cf. Ramsay 1911–1912 and 1912; for a discussion of the hypothesis and the weakness of the arguments adopted cf. Cosi 1976, pp. 48–51. On Gordion and the kingdom of Phrygia cf. the studies by J.K. Sams, especially Sams 1988; 1993 and 1997 and K. De Vries, especially De Vries 1980a; 1987; 1988, to which can be added Voigt – Henrickson 2000.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Cosi 1976; Buluç 1988. Roller puts forward the hypothesis that the image of the goddess on the rock façades, framed by an architectural structure, refers not to a temple but to the royal palace, thus lending support to the close connection between goddess and royalty (Roller 1988, p. 49 and 1999, p. 112). By placing the goddess in the mountains (rock façades) but within an urban context (decoration of façades and door) the Phrygians would have stressed her divine character as transcending boundaries. More specifically: “this same ability to communicate with both the wild and tame environment may underline the use of architectural façades in funerary cult also, for here too the deity transcends boundaries, in this case the irrevocable boundary between the known environment of life and the unknown world of death” (Roller 1999, p. 113).

of the link between the great goddess and the Phrygian royal dynasty is provided by the rock monument of Yazılıkaya, otherwise known as the “tomb of Midas”¹⁰⁶: the structure, with a niche in which a statue of the Great Mother was probably placed, is dedicated by Ates¹⁰⁷ to Midas¹⁰⁸, called “king and leader” (*Midai lavagetai vanaktei*)¹⁰⁹.

The epigraphic evidence mentioned above proves that the term Attis occurred as a proper name in different religious contexts. The fact that it occurs as the name of both the dedicator and the dedicatee leads to further reflection: could it be in origin a royal name that was then used both by the king (or by a member of the royal family) who made the dedication, and by the one to whom the dedication is addressed, who is also a member of the royal family but, so to speak, “deified”? Here, of course, a problem emerges for which, with our present knowledge, there is no easy solution: in what sense can we consider as “divine” the subject of a dedication, or even: did the Phrygians consider a dead king to be “divine”? The alternative may not be so drastic, a dead king could enjoy “quasi-divine” status or at least one different from common mortals, for example like the royal ancestors of other ancient Near Eastern cultures¹¹⁰. The distinction between human/divine/heroic – it is almost unnecessary to mention

¹⁰⁶ Scholars do not agree on the date of the monument, oscillating between the 8th and the 6th cent., cf. Haspels 1971, I, pp. 100-111; De Vries 1988, pp. 51-59; Brixhe – Lejeune 1984, I, M 1-01a; Cassola 1997, p. 145 n. 61.

¹⁰⁷ Both in his 1977 monograph and in *CCCA*, Vermaseren only comments on the part of the inscription concerning Midas and does not mention Ates at all (Vermaseren 1977, p. 20 and Vermaseren 1977-1989, I, p. 58 n. 168). As Frazer had correctly noted (see the following note), the name in question belongs undeniably to the same class of *Lallnamen* to which Attis and Atys also belong and can be considered as variants. Cf. the remarks of Zgusta who, after recording the various forms – although they are collected in a single paragraph (119) – notes: “Zu dieser Stippe von Lallnamen gehören eigentlich zwei Gruppen von Namen: 1) eine Lallnamensippe wie *ap(p)a*, *am(m)a* usw., 2. Der bekannte GN Ἀττης, Ἀττις gehört selbst zu dieser Lallnamensippe” (Zgusta 1964, p. 110).

¹⁰⁸ Frazer 1906, p. 178, had already noted the word “father” as a probable etymological reference to the name Attis and in the following chapter had connected it with the monument to Midas and to the Phrygian monarchy: “(...) a very ancient inscription carved in the rock above a famous Phrygian monument was made for, or dedicated to, King Midas by a certain Ates, whose name is doubtless identical with Attis, and who, if not a king himself, may have been one of the royal family”, (*id.*, p. 183).

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of these two epithets of Midas see Müller 1824, p. 8 n. 1; Huxley 1959; Lejeune 1979; De Graaf 1989; Cassola 1997, pp. 145-146. Cf. also Drews 1993.

¹¹⁰ For example, cf. Ugarit and Phoenicia. On the problem cf. most recently Merlo – Xella 2001.

– belongs to Greek culture and cannot be uncritically ascribed to other cultural contexts¹¹¹.

The fact that it is to Midas, a Phrygian king whose historicity no longer seems in doubt, that the monument of Yazılıkaya¹¹² is dedicated specifically by a certain Ates, seems to indicate, at least in that case, the possibility of “heroising”¹¹³ the king¹¹⁴. And as we shall see, that represents an element of continuity with earlier Hittite culture. The term Ates (and its variants) could have been used subsequently to denote a priestly office, as explicitly documented in later literary and epigraphic sources¹¹⁵. In this connection it should be noted that in the Midas monument, Ates is followed by the terms *arkiaevais akenanogavos*. *Ates arkiaevais* is a two-element onomastic formula (idionym + patronymic)¹¹⁶, while the third term, in Old Phrygian, could denote a high priestly role¹¹⁷. Thus, it is not easy to determine the nature of the cult involving the name of Ates, even if links with a funerary setting cannot be ignored.

¹¹¹ On the morphology of Greek heroes cf. the classic study Brelich 1958 and the bibliographical survey in Merlo – Xella 2001.

¹¹² Cf. also graffito I in Brixhe-Lejeune 1984, pp. 12-14, M-01d and the inscription of Areyastis, *id.*, pp. 36-41, W-01 a-b. There is also a reference to Midas at Tyana, *id.*, pp. 264-266, T-02b, on which Mellink 1979.

¹¹³ Of course the comments just made on “deification” also apply to the use of this term.

¹¹⁴ On the reason why the monument of Yazılıkaya was dedicated to him, Roller 1988, p. 48 writes: “Possibly because the memory of the famous ruler of the Phrygian Empire in the late eighth and early seventh centuries B.C. was so strong that he became a personage in the cult and an object of religious dedication after his death – perhaps a Phrygian system analogous to the Greek hero cult”. Cf. also De Vries 1988, pp. 58-59.

¹¹⁵ For the name Attis (and its variants) used to denote a priestly function in the cult of the Great Mother cf. Polyb. XXI 37, 5, and the correspondence between the priest of Pessinous and the king of Pergamon (163-156 BCE). These documents are discussed below.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Innocente 1997, p. 40.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Vassileva 1997, p. 269. The term also occurs in the inscription of Areyastis and is understood by Lubotsky 1988, pp. 12-13, as a title of Bonok, the dedicator (a new translation of the inscription is given in Janda 1997). Orel 1990, p. 108, translates “protector of monuments”. Innocente 1997, p. 40, surmises that the term is, instead, the name of the paternal grandfather, in the genitive. According to Ramsay’s interpretation, the term *kavoi* is an original Anatolian term for the priesthood attested in the Hellenised word *Attabokaioi*, the “goat-priests”, a name used in two inscriptions from the period of the empire for a special group of followers of the Great Mother at Pessinous (Ramsay 1920, p. 198). This interpretation is supported by Lubotsky’s comments on the term *akenanogavos*: “The suffix of *akenanogavos* / **akenanogava* is a thematicization of the suffix *-an-* < **-eu-* which in Greek often denotes a profession or a social function (...). In Phrygian we may find the same suffix in the title *proitavos* (M-01b; M-02) (...)”, Lubotsky 1988, p. 12.

Links between the “Great Mother” and the funerary structures are documented, instead, by the excavations carried out near Ankara¹¹⁸ and Gordion¹¹⁹. It cannot be excluded that the rock façades dedicated to the goddess are connected with the funerary monuments. In fact, they have some of the same iconographical elements as those monuments, for example, images of animals of prey¹²⁰. In the epitaph of Midas, which was well known in antiquity, in which the speaker is “a girl in bronze lying on the tomb of Midas”, there could perhaps be an allusion to the rock monument of Yazılıkaya¹²¹; the structure, with a niche¹²² in which very probably a statue of the Great Mother was placed, was dedicated by Ates to Midas and this would confirm the link between the great goddess and the Phrygian royal dynasty¹²³.

The traditional association of the Great Mother with birds of prey could also be used, at least during the period of domination of Phrygia by the Lydian kingdom, in terms of the connection between the goddess and royalty. In fact birds of prey seem to be one of the oldest attributes of the goddess¹²⁴ and as one of her prerogatives, would also

¹¹⁸ Buluç 1988, p. 20.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, in the form of a miniature altar of Cybele which may have come from grave C.

¹²⁰ Cf. Roller 1999, pp. 250-251.

¹²¹ Buluç 1988, p. 21 and n. 45 and Cassola 1997, pp. 147-148 (with a discussion of the sources and their interpretations).

¹²² Various hypotheses have been put forward concerning the meaning to be assigned the door-niche: cf. for example Così 1976a, who seems to favour an “initiating” interpretation of the monument; it combines two fundamental aspects of the symbolism of the door, the symbolic and the chthonian; instead, Roller 1988, proposes that the rock façade “represents (...) the front of a royal residence where the goddess was worshiped” (p. 49). More generally on the symbolism of the door in the Hittite world see Del Monte 1973: “la porta è in conclusione la rappresentante più immediata di quella apertura attraverso la quale due mondi tra sé inconciliabili possono venire a contatto” (p. 129). In her recent study Vassileva establishes a connection between the rock façades, a possible sacred marriage and the funereal symbolism pertaining to the Phrygian king: “It could be suggested that rock façades with niches intended for the image of the Goddess (...) were perceived as places for the sacred marriage of the Phrygian ruler, as well his symbolic grave. Phrygian wooden chamber have no entrance or door, and the dead and the offerings were lowered down before the roof was finally constructed (...). Similarly, lowering down into a cut-rock shaft behind a niche could have symbolised both a burial and the union with the goddess”, Vassileva 2001, pp. 60-61.

¹²³ Orel 1970, p. 107, considers instead the Great Mother (*matar*) and Attis (*ata, atto*, Neo-Phrygian *atti(ē)*) to be the two principal Phrygian deities, opposed to each other and connected with two different panthea. The former was originally worshipped in East Phrygia whereas Attis was linked to the West.

¹²⁴ Cf. Mellink 1983; Roller 1991. For iconographic precedents cf. Güterbock 1942, n. 220 = Beran 1967 n. 135; Özgüç 1979, p. 283.

indicate a special connection with hunting¹²⁵. The link between the goddess and the sparrow-hawk in particular has a further precedent in Neo-Hittite Carchemish, where the ideogram for Kubaba is that specific bird¹²⁶, and this association persisted even to a late period¹²⁷. If the sparrow-hawk, *mermnos* in Greek, is to be related to the Mermnad dynasty¹²⁸, the ancient iconography of Great Mother + sparrow-hawk would confirm the wish of the royal family ruling in Lydia to establish a link of continuity with the previous Phrygian reign, according to what has already emerged from analysis of the genealogical tradition. Confirmation of this could be provided by the discovery at Sardis of an altar dedicated to *Kuvav* (Kubaba) in the centre of the quarter where electrum was refined¹²⁹, near which was found the head of a sparrow-hawk in bronze¹³⁰.

Due to recent advances in the study of New Phrygian, a significant number of tomb inscriptions from the imperial period must be eliminated from the dossier on Attis in Phrygia. Scholars had presumed that they mentioned Attis, considered the protector of the tombs in question, from the formula ΑΤΤΙ ΑΔΕΙΤΟΥ ¹³¹ and the like. Instead, Lubotsky¹³² has analysed the sequence ΑΤΤΙ/ΑΤΤΙΕ/ΑΤΤΙΗ as a prepositional syntagm composed of $\alpha\delta$ + dat. $\tau\iota/\tau\iota\epsilon/\tau\iota\eta$. The interpretation was later discussed by Brixhe, who accepts the basic elements of that hypothesis¹³³. Whatever the meaning of the syntagm $\alpha\tau \tau\iota\epsilon$ and its variants may be, it cannot be used in the documentation on Attis.

From all this evidence, which is unfortunately sporadic and often

¹²⁵ For the connections between hunting and the monarchy in situations where hunting is no longer the basic activity for nourishment, see below.

¹²⁶ Cf. Barnett 1948, p. 22 e fig. 21; Talamo 1979, p. 130. Add also Laroche 1960, pp. 76-78, n. 128; Hawkins 1970, p. 90; Hawkins 1981, p. 258. On the connections between the goddess Kubaba and Cybele cf. Roller 1994a, who queries the thesis put forward by Laroche (Laroche 1960a), and supported by many scholars, that Kubaba is the direct ancestor of Cybele. According to Borgeaud 1996, pp. 19-25, at Sardis there was a meeting and a fusion between (Phrygian) Cybele and (the more oriental) Kubaba-Kubebe.

¹²⁷ Ael., *N.A.* XII 4.

¹²⁸ Barnett 1948, p. 22; Talamo 1979, p. 132 n. 316.

¹²⁹ On the connections between Cybele and metal-working that already existed in Phrygia cf. the portico standing in front of the tomb of Midas, explained as a foundry (Gabriel 1965, p. 68ff.; Cosi 1976, p. 116 n. 18).

¹³⁰ Several models of birds of prey have emerged from the excavations at Gordion and Boghazköy, cf. Roller 1999, p. 79.

¹³¹ Cf. Vermaseren 1977, p. 24; Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 90 and n. 21; Vermaseren 1977-1989, I, inscriptions 42-46, 49, 64, 113, 788, 799, 802.

¹³² Lubotsky 1988, p. 24 n. 13; 1989, pp. 84-85.

¹³³ Brixhe 1997, pp. 42-49.

obscure, certain conclusions can nonetheless be drawn. This Anatolian “Great Mother”, with her many privileges and her long and complex history, is connected quite clearly with hunting, with funerary cults and with royalty, in what one senses to be an organically connected whole. Yet, it is not always possible to separate all its component parts clearly nor to determine the meanings expressed by the various interrelationships. The historical events in Phrygia which, in the period under consideration, was continually shaken by political revolts and invasion by foreigners, must also have further assisted the fragmentation of a picture that was already difficult to trace.

2.4. *Pessinous: a new mythical model*

Roller perceives the “authentic” Phrygian nucleus in the mythical tradition about Attis to be in the importance ascribed to the Great Mother in connection with the mountain and the funerary monuments and with the lamentation ritual for Attis. On the lament in particular, Roller proposes the hypothesis that “the Phrygian rulers maintained a close relationship with the Mother’s cult as part of their official obligations, the funeral of one of these rulers would have been an occasion of official mourning, being seen as the loss of the goddess’ most important earthly devotee, perhaps even of her earthly consort. After the disappearance of kingship in Phrygia, the cult responsibilities of a royal, human Attis would have been taken over in part by the human priest, as we know from the documents of Hellenistic Pessinous. The mourning may have referred to the funeral of a high priest Attis, or it may have evolved into an annual ritual of an abstract figure of a king named Attis, perhaps a ritual analogous to a Greek hero cult, all the more important to the Phrygian people because it was a survival from Phrygia’s period of glory”¹³⁴.

From a detailed analysis of the various versions of the Attis myth, I think that it is possible to reach more specific conclusions concerning the history and the function he and his mythical adventures had within the various contexts – in time and space – in which they were produced and circulated.

For this purpose, two of the oldest and most authoritative sources

¹³⁴ Roller 1999, p. 252.

in question, Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, take on a key role. It is they who insist on connecting our hero with historical or historicised facts and, precisely because of this, are considered by some as not very trustworthy because they were influenced by euhemeristic ideas. Without wishing to deny their indebtedness to that ideology – particularly in the case of Diodorus – here as in other cases it is too hasty to deny *a priori* their information any reliability and documentary worth without verifying in depth whether it is a distorting ideological filter within the actual source or whether it is an original and authentic element present in the very religious traditions they record.

As for ancient Near Eastern mythologies and in particular their external sources, a whole series of studies has shown – as in the typical case of Philo of Byblos for Phoenician polytheism¹³⁵ – that the presumed “euhemeristic” traits are an integral part of the religion attested in other sources not under suspicion (from the Old Testament up to “indigenous” texts). In fact, the ancient religions of Asia Minor, especially of Syria-Palestine, exhibit the presence of characters from myth and cult whose characteristics are that they are considered ancient prototypical kings and that they are all protagonists – *mutatis mutandis* – of the phenomenon of death and a change of status that lifts them to a superhuman level¹³⁶.

If on the basis of external sources alone the god Melqart were said to be an ancient king of Tyre who was deified, it would be quite correct to speak of a classic case of euhemerisation. But the argument changes abruptly as soon as it is realised that in Phoenician, even from the Iron Age, the name Melqart means in fact “king of the city”¹³⁷. Or are we to think that the Phoenicians were euhemerists *ante*

¹³⁵ Cf. for example the important reflections of Ebach 1979, pp. 393-408 (“Tendenzen der Interpretation von Kultur und Zivilisation und der ‘Euhemerismus’ der Philo-Fragmente”) who notes appropriately how E. Renan himself had spoken, with intuitive insight, of “évhémérisme naturel aux Sémites” (p. 397); see also Ribichini 1985, pp. 41-73 (“L’eroe divino”).

¹³⁶ Cf. most recently Xella 2001a. The problem is also posed, *mutatis mutandis*, for Egypt, with its well-rooted tradition of placing at the beginning of pharaonic dynasties certain divine characters considered to be ancient kings that lived on earth in remote antiquity (cf. the Turin Papyrus). Exactly as is the case for Philo, comparison with Egyptian documents makes it difficult to determine any possible “euhemeristic” contribution by authors such as Manetho or Hecataeus of Abdera, who refer to those traditions. This problem, which requires more detailed analysis, is briefly set out in Ebach 1979, pp. 339-340, with a reference to Hornung 1971, p. 147 and pp. 228ff.

¹³⁷ In general, cf. Bonnet 1988.

litteram? And, to go back even further in time, what about the cult of royal ancestors at Ebla, their names written with the divine determinative and, consistently, honoured like gods in the actual texts from Tell Mardikh¹³⁸? How explain, then, the cult of the Rapiuma in Ugarit, deified ancestors of royal lineage that include mythical figures such as Aqhat and Keret, and whose eponym is the polyadic god, Baal himself¹³⁹, if not by the tendency of the religions in this region to empower royalty in an impressive way, with a cult of the most eminent persons of the tradition, ritually placed among the superhumans of a semi-divine rank, protectors of the king and of national prosperity?

These reflections apply to the debated case of Adonis, also considered a “dying god”¹⁴⁰, and are equally valid in a macroscopic case such as the mythology of Greek heroes. They would almost disappear into the euhemeristic abyss if one were to apply the criterion of deleting every case of a person considered as king or prince and connected with one or more fully historical places.

The foregoing reflections and the results of the studies cited above are equally valid for our Attis, a character and a name that are anything but lacking in historical roots, since they are documented in firsthand reports from Phrygia. Even so, account must be taken of a complex revision of facts that are perhaps partly historical, and cannot be taken simplistically at face value, but need to be suitably interpreted and decoded. With this in mind, we prepare to reconsider Attis, his important location in Phrygia and also his close connection with the exact place in this region in which, according to the mythical traditions, he died and is lamented, namely Pessinous.

The oldest tradition concerning the cult of Attis in Pessinous seems, in fact, to be attested in the account by Diodorus Siculus, who established a link between Cybele and Attis that differs from both the “Lydian” and “Phrygian” versions. It is closer to the tradition as attested in Herodotus, who makes Atys a king. The reference to Maion, Cybele’s father, as “king of Phrygia and Lydia”, projects this account back to a pre-Lydian dimension, that is, to a “mythical” Phrygia to which the Mermnads appealed as the foundation of their dynasty. As we learn from Herodotus, the name of the Lydians is

¹³⁸ See the analytical catalogue by Pomponio – Xella 1997.

¹³⁹ Cf. most recently Merlo – Xella 2001, with previous bibliography.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Ribichini 2001.

taken from the people called Maeonian before the reign of Lydos¹⁴¹.

It seems fairly clear that here Cybele's father must be considered the eponym of the Maeonians, and this sets the account in a historical time prior to the Attyad dynasty¹⁴². It is clear from the continuation of the narrative that its specific aim is to establish the shift from pre-Attyad to post-Attyad Phrygia. In the account by Diodorus it is in fact possible to discern the various stages of a dynastic struggle between King Maion, Cybele's father, and Attis, the "local lad" loved by the girl, who is killed. First, Maion's daughter, even though legitimate, is exposed by her father as she is a female and thus of no influence in the perspective of dynastic succession. Her later union with a "local lad", i.e. a Phrygian, implies a probable return of the kingship "improperly" exercised by Maion to a local clan. This interpretation is made plausible by the readmission to the palace of the young girl who, having survived exposure, is now grown up and surprisingly beautiful. She is held to be a virgin and, from the aspect of dynastic politics, now seems precious, since she can be "used" in a political marriage. Her subsequent rejection occurs when that plan is nullified by her pregnancy. However, what unleashes her father's anger to the limit is the fact that Cybele was made pregnant by a "local" youth, a fact that could lead to the "son-in-law" reclaiming the throne. The murder of Attis, and above all the removal of his body, solve the problem in that Cybele's son does not have a recognised father, an essential requirement for normal dynastic succession. Thus, this event deprives the princess of her own husband who, in that capacity, is a possible aspirant to the throne "of Phrygia and Lydia". But above all, it deprives the unborn child of acceptance by his own father and so makes him irretrievably "illegitimate".

The death of Attis causes the cosmic order to be overturned and it will be restored only after, through consultation of an oracle, a royal tomb cult of Attis is founded, as well as a divine cult of Cybele. It is important to stress that this is not the work of Maion but of Midas, that is, a king who to a Greek mind is "authentically" Phrygian¹⁴³. On the other hand, the now "pregnant" Cybele ensures that

¹⁴¹ Herod., I 7. On the problem of the date when the change of name actually occurred, cf. Talamo 1979, pp. 65-98. She dates this change to the same time as the formation of the list of Attyads, i.e. the 7th cent. BCE.

¹⁴² On the specific period see the previous note. In any case, the very mention of Maion as "king of Phrygia and Lydia" suggests a projection backwards in time of a later event: historically speaking, Maion and Lydia are incompatible.

Attis will have a son and thus the succession. The paternal function of the youth, apart from being registered in his own name, is further emphasised by the rider which states that later he will be called Papas. The existence of a tomb of Attis in Pessinous is also documented by Pausanias¹⁴⁴.

The tradition recorded by Diodorus, then, does belong to the dossier concerning the attempt by the Mermnad dynasty to construct for itself a Phrygian “prehistory” in order to guarantee its own legitimacy to the throne. However, it is also important to emphasise another set of facts to emerge from this tradition, i.e. those that reveal how the account in question is not to be considered simply as propaganda thought up theoretically, but instead has its roots deep in the most ancient Anatolian past. In the events that followed the death of Attis, in fact, two themes occur that seem to continue Hittite ideology and ritual practice: on the one hand, the overthrow of natural laws (pestilence, famine) caused by an assassination, on the other, the need to pacify the “anger of the dead”¹⁴⁵. Although these two aspects are not exclusive to the Hittite world, they are particularly significant because they are to be added to the other elements that have been collected, thus making more plausible the supposed ideological contribution of Hittite culture to the formation of mythical and ritual tradition concerning Attis in Phrygia.

Exactly as in the account by Diodorus, the consequences unleashed by a murder in Hittite culture could provoke actual disturbances due to the resulting impurity, and order can be restored only by the intervention of a deity¹⁴⁶. In other cases, the ritual action must be directed specifically to appeasing the murder¹⁴⁷. Even the oracular enquiry, used in Hittite ritual to determine the causes of certain negative events, is to be found in the account concealed in the unspecified consultation of the god and in his reply¹⁴⁸. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that according to reports of Hittite oracles, the dead referred to often

¹⁴³ On Midas as the founder of Pessinous cf. Theop., FGrHist 115 F 260 (= Amm. Marc., XXII 9, 6-7), according to whom the city was given its name by Midas; the founding of the city of Pessinous or of the temple dedicated by Midas to the Great Mother in Hygin., *Fab.* 274, Marshall p. 196; Arnob., *Adv. nat.* II 73 and V 7.

¹⁴⁴ Paus., I 4, 5. Firmicus Maternus, *De err. prof. rel.* III, also provides the information on a funerary cult of Attis in Pessinous.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Del Monte 1977.

¹⁴⁶ *Id.*, pp. 374-377.

¹⁴⁷ *Id.*, p. 377.

¹⁴⁸ On accounts of Hittite oracles concerning the wrath of the dead cf. Del Monte 1977, pp. 377ff.; 1987, p.103ff.; more generally Kammenhuber 1976; Archi 1991.

belong to the upper classes, an indication of their involvement in the struggle for power, exactly as happens in the contest between Maion and Attis, as is clear in the account by Diodorus, despite the “romantic” colouring of thwarted love. Finally, noteworthy is the evidence, also in Hittite culture, for the consecration of a place in an attempt to appease the murder of a high-ranking person. The alteration of the cosmic order in the account by Diodorus can also be connected not only with the anger of Attis but also with Cybele’s: the affront to a goddess and its consequences, the relationship between cause and effect that exists between murder/pestilence/sterility are motifs to be found both in the ancient Near East and in the Greek world¹⁴⁹.

Thus, the version recorded by Diodorus Siculus involved Attis in a dynastic struggle that ended with the setting up of a funerary cult. However, both the link between goddess and monarchy, and the permanent institution of a funerary cult linked with the monarchy belong to the royal Anatolian model¹⁵⁰. The first has already been discussed. As for the second, in the ritual for Hittite royal funerals, as known from Boghazköy¹⁵¹, the death of the king, as guarantor of the unity of the country, and high priest and guardian of the cosmic order, causes the existing order to be overturned and it has to be restored through the correct performance of funeral rites. The “great sin” (i.e. the upset) that afflicts the land occurs precisely at the moment when the king “becomes a god”, that is, when he dies. Death marks the passage to a different dimension, which is divine¹⁵², but this does not preclude

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Considine 1969 and Xella 1976, pp. 80-81 (for bibliography on the ancient Near East and the Greek world see especially nn. 72-73). It is worth reflecting that in myth, when a death is “just”, the spilt blood “is productive” instead, producing flowers and plants. This is precisely what happens in the version of the myth by Arnobius and in mythical traditions about other mythical characters, such as Adonis or Hyacinthus.

¹⁵⁰ Continuity between Hittite and Phrygian ritual practices is revealed from analysis of the funerary bed from grave MM in Gordion, cf. Simpson 1990.

¹⁵¹ This ritual is known from several cuneiform tablets. The first critical edition was by Otten 1958, translated into French by Christmann-Franck 1961. Cf. later Van den Hout 1994 and 1995; Taracha 1998. On Hittite funerals, especially of kings, cf. most recently Haas 2000.

¹⁵² The text begins with the statement “when a great sin occurs in Hattuša”: the death of the king is thus considered a violation of the cosmic order, that is a “sin”, that has to be remedied. But this event is also the one by which “the king (or queen) becomes a god”, so that the funerary rituals take on “caratteristiche proprie sia dei rituali magici che delle celebrazioni di feste: essi devono liberare Hattuša dall’impurità, favorire il passaggio del sovrano dalla condizione umana a quella divina e sancire l’avvenuta divinizzazione” (Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1994, p. 208). There is also evidence for the deification of the dead king in a substitution ritual, KBo XV 2 Rs. 14’ – 19’ (cf. Del Monte 1975, p. 323).

the dead rulers being considered or continuing to be treated as dead. The cult of dead kings is modelled on the cult reserved for deities, even if, unlike temples, their mausoleums, the “Houses of Stone”, are “closed” structures, under autonomous control and able to fulfil “in their own right” all the requirements of a continuous cult¹⁵³. The various mausoleums were organised so as to “assicurare al defunto un afflusso continuo di mezzi di sussistenza”¹⁵⁴ and – given the high cost of preparation and maintenance – they were reserved for a king or at least a member of the royal family.

Several elements are undoubtedly reminiscent of the situation at Pessinous as recorded in the report by Diodorus. I think that not only those already mentioned with reference to the “overturning” of order caused by the death of someone royal and the setting up of a cult for the purpose of “normalising” the critical situation, but also the nature of the rites established for Attis, intended to appease his anger and at the same time to keep him permanently in the Netherworld, can all be constructively understood in the light of the royal Hittite funerary cult¹⁵⁵, with the appropriate historical adjustments, of course.

The report by Diodorus seems to refer specifically to an institution of the Hittite “House of Stone” type, located near Pessinous¹⁵⁶. With reasonable probability it can therefore be proposed that the oldest cult of Attis was for someone of royal lineage, of the type accorded in the Hittite period and probably also in the Phrygian period, to deceased kings and princes¹⁵⁷. However, this hypothesis has to take into account an historical fact, for which there is certain evidence

¹⁵³ On “Houses of Stone” cf. Imparati 1977; Del Monte 1975; Van den Hout 1994, pp. 48-52. It is possible to make a comparison, perhaps, with the “Mausoleum”, *é-ma-tim* (“house of the dead/of death”) mentioned in the ritual texts from Ebla (cf. Fronzaroli 1993, *passim*) even if there is as yet little information about it.

¹⁵⁴ Del Monte 1975, p. 328.

¹⁵⁵ In the *šalliš waštaiš* ritual, “il “tempio circondato da timore” e le offerte per il sovrano defunto sono accompagnate dall’invito al morto a “non adirarsi in seguito” e ad essere benevolo nei confronti dei propri discendenti” (Del Monte 1975, p. 328).

¹⁵⁶ The fact that the body of Attis was not buried is not a problem: the Hékur houses did not necessarily contain the bodies of the kings worshipped there (Van den Hout 1994, p. 49).

¹⁵⁷ There also seems to have been a “heroising” process for Midas, cf. DeVries 1988, pp. 57-58; Roller 1988, pp. 43-50, p. 48. It is a basic element of religion in the Syro-Anatolian region, to which scholars rightly continue to draw attention. Also to be noted is a tradition that makes Midas the son of Cybele: Plut., *Caes.* 9, 2; Hygin., *Fab.* 191; 274, ed. Marshall; according to Lactantius Placidus, Hesiod and Ovid also record this tradition, Lact. Plac., *Narr. fab. Ovid., Met. XI, fab. IV*. A discussion of classical sources on Midas in Roller 1983; Muscarella 1989 and Cassola 1997.

from the 3rd cent. BCE, namely, the existence in Pessinous of a “temple-state”, administered by a priesthood comprising eunuchs, as later tradition maintains. As will be remembered, castration, on the other hand, is an element in the mythical and ritual tradition about the “Phrygian” Attis. Certain scholars have attempted to minimise the value of emasculation in the mythical account, considering the episode as a later addition, due to the need for providing an aetiology for one aspect of the rite, the self-castration of the Galli, through its projection in myth¹⁵⁸. In my opinion, the narration of a similar event in the “Phrygian” version is to be analysed by taking into account its position within the mythical narrative that records it, attempting to determine its specific function. In particular, it must be confirmed that no element of the mythical tradition can be considered simply as an “addition”. Each of its versions, in fact, at the time it was composed and used is itself the “original” version inasmuch as it implies a re-interpretation of the actual myth and the characters acting in it according to a self-contained logic even if we do not always find it easy to understand.

Starting from this presupposition, I consider that it is possible to establish a connection between the insertion into the myth of the episode about the mutilation of Attis and the setting up of a priestly theocracy at Pessinous.

At the beginning of the 7th century, Phrygia’s loss of independence entailed the dismissal of the ruling monarchy¹⁵⁹, even though the centre of Pessinous¹⁶⁰ continued to retain a certain degree of independence. From the 3rd cent. BCE, this led to the institution of a “temple state” governed by a priestly caste at the head of which was a priest

¹⁵⁸ “As guiding theme of the myth, the motif of the castration makes no sense. It is absent from several versions of the story altogether, indicating that the castration episode is not essential to the myth. Even when it is present, it lacks a coherent connection to the story. Nowhere it is explained why self-castration killed Attis. It clearly did not kill most of his priest, who were supposedly following the god’s example. Viewed in this light, the scene of the castration of Attis seems like a late addendum to the myth, one that was designed to combine two basic features of Phrygian cult practice, the annual mourning for an Attis and the self-castration (for whatever reasons) of Phrygian priests of the Mother” (Roller 1999, p. 254). Cf. Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 28 n. 10, for a brief survey of the opinions held by scholars.

¹⁵⁹ After the invasion by the Cimmerians and the ensuing defeat, Midas commits suicide. The event took place in 696-695 or 695-694 BCE; on the problem of the date cf. Cassola 1997, p. 143.

¹⁶⁰ On Pessinous cf. Devreker – Waelkens 1984 (excavations) and especially the article by Devreker (Devreker 1984, the history of the city). On the sanctuary in the imperial period cf. Waelkens 1986.

with the title of “Attis”¹⁶¹. The organisation of the clergy at Pessinous, however, was subject to considerable changes over time. For the earlier periods information on Pessinous is rather scarce. However, a passage by Strabo¹⁶² and one by Cicero¹⁶³ reveal the prestige of that sanctuary in earlier times¹⁶⁴.

The first explicit evidence on the priesthood at Pessinous puts at its head two Galli¹⁶⁵ called “Attis” and “Battakes”. It is a passage from Polybius¹⁶⁶ which recounts how, during the expedition of consul Cn. Manlius Vulsus against the Galatians (189 BCE)¹⁶⁷, some Galli appeared in front of the leader sent by Attis and Battakes¹⁶⁸ and prophesied his victory¹⁶⁹. During the reign of the Attalids¹⁷⁰ in Pergamon, the priests of Pessinous must have had not only religious power but also some form of political power, as documented in the correspondence between the kings of Pergamon, Eumenes II and Attalos II, and Attis, the priest of the temple of the Great Mother at Pessinous (163-156 BCE)¹⁷¹. We are unable to determine at which period self-castration was introduced into the cult of the Great Mother¹⁷².

¹⁶¹ Cf. Virgilio 1981; Debord 1982, pp. 56-58; Boffo 1985, pp. 34-41.

¹⁶² Strab., XII 5,3, speaks of Pessinous as a large market in his time, but he also refers to an earlier period when the priests of the sanctuary of Agdistis were really *dynastai*: Πεσσινοῦς δ' ἐστὶν ἐμπόριον τῶν ταύτῃ μέγιστον, ἱερὸν ἔχον τῆς Μητρὸς τῶν θεῶν σεβασμοῦ μεγάλου τυγχάνον· καλοῦσι δ' αὐτὴν Ἀγδιστιν. Οἱ δ' ἱερεῖς τὸ παλαιὸν μὲν δυνάσται τινὲς ἦσαν, ἱερωσύνην καρποῦμενοι μεγάλην, νυνὶ δὲ τούτων μὲν αἱ τιμαὶ πολλὰ μεμείωνται, τὸ δ' ἐμπόριον συμμένει·

¹⁶³ Cicero, *De harusp. resp.* XIII 28: *omnia illa (scil. the goods of the temple at Pessinous), quae vetustas, quae Persae, quae Suri, quae reges omnes qui Europam Asiamque tenuerunt semper summa religione coluerunt.*

¹⁶⁴ On the similarities between the city-state of Pessinous and other Anatolian sanctuaries and temples in the Hellenistic period, which it is possible to prove were important in a much earlier period, cf. Archi 1975; Virgilio 1981, pp. 57-65; Boffo 1985.

¹⁶⁵ This is the traditional name for the eunuch-devotees of the Great Mother.

¹⁶⁶ Polyb., XXI 37,4-7. Livy also records the episode but makes no reference to Attis or to Battakes (Liv., XXXVIII 18, 9).

¹⁶⁷ On the presence of Galatians in Asia Minor cf. Strobel 1991; Mitchell 1993, *passim*, Darbyshire – Mitchell – Vardar 2000. For the Roman empire cf. Magie 1950.

¹⁶⁸ On the second priestly title cf. Diod. Sic., XXXVI 13, 1; Plut., *Marius* 17, 5-6; Robert 1963, pp. 533-534.

¹⁶⁹ However, only the Galli are mentioned in the passages by Polybius (XXI 6, 7) and Livy (XXXVII 9, 9) concerning C. Livius Salinator's siege of Sestus (190 BCE).

¹⁷⁰ On this dynasty see most recently Virgilio 1993.

¹⁷¹ This correspondence is examined in Virgilio 1981.

¹⁷² Eunuchism is attested in Mesopotamia and probably in Anatolia (cf. Deller 1969; Grotanelli 1998) but its use in ritual is uncertain. On the more specific problem of the Galli cf. Lane 1996a, especially p. 132 n. 27. For Semitic cf. the classic studies by Nöldeke 1907 and Widengren 1953.

Despite this, at least from the 3rd cent. BCE, we find in Pessinous a theocracy of eunuch priests who rule over the temple of the Great Mother, and their highest dignitary assumes the title of Attis. My hypothesis is that the “Phrygian” tradition of the myth depicts the foundation myth of that fact. If, as seems likely, in the period of the monarchy at Pessinous there was a cult near a tomb in which, a prince of the Phrygian royal house may have been buried, it is also likely that the ensuing political events had an effect on the ideology underlying that cult. It must also have transformed the structure of the sacred site, with relevant changes in the priesthood and its functions¹⁷³.

To return to the comparison between the ancient Hittite “Houses of stone” and the funerary cult at Pessinous, it must be stressed that the former, although independent, maintained close relations with the central apparatus of the state from which they themselves also emanated. A similar situation must have applied in Pessinous during Phrygian rule. But when that sanctuary was transformed into a temple-state, even in the continuation of the cultic practices relating to the “tomb of Attis”, it would no longer have the now vanished Phrygian monarchy as a reference point. Instead the foundation of its priestly theocracy was a “new” and paradoxical dynastic model, that of an “anti-king”, based consistently on its sterility and thus on its non-hereditary nature.

It is specifically the so-called “Phrygian” version of the myth that is the foundation of that model: exactly as in the account by Diodorus Siculus, Attis continues to remain a person “who dies”, even if in the “Phrygian” version this occurs in direct contrast with the traditional royal model, that is, without descendants. The tomb cult originally reserved for the dead king is transformed into a tomb cult reserved for a dead non-king¹⁷⁴. From this concept of the person as king (he reproduces and is a father) a transformation takes place that makes him the “typical” priest of Pessinous (who cannot and

¹⁷³ The restructure of the temple of Cybele in Pessinous by the Attalids into a Greek temple may also have meant that the cult was “Hellenised”. In addition, it is very important to be aware that at the time of the Attalids the hierarchies of Pessinous were Galatian and no longer Phrygian (cf. Virgilio 1981, pp. 94-95), which may have led to Phrygian elements of the cult being obliterated (or reshaped).

¹⁷⁴ Self-castration understood as the renunciation of self-reproduction marks a separation from the dynastic model which is based on the passage of royalty from father to son.

must not reproduce himself and so cannot be a father)¹⁷⁵.

The fundamentally important element to bear in mind is that this priesthood sees and portrays itself precisely in terms diametrically opposed to the preceding “royalty” of Attis. The “Phrygian” version provides a basis for the “nobility” of the priesthood – which retains the prerogatives of the royal dynasties – but at the same time it destroys the very basis of the monarchy, that is the transmission of power through succession from father to son.

In the mythical genealogy of the Atyads that seems to reflect an earlier historical situation to the one in the “Phrygian” version of the myth, we find that Atys was sired either by Ma(s)nes or by Kotys – depending on the author – but always according to a dynastic criterion that, however mythologised, seems completely “normal”. Normally a father is succeeded by a son. In the “Phrygian” version, instead, Attis is the fruit of a miraculous birth that occurs only after a complex sequence of “failed” unions – or rather – of “improper” unions, starting from the one by Zeus who, unsuccessful in taking the Great Mother, impregnates a mountain. This in turn gives birth to the monster Agdistis, who in his turn is the unwitting father of a son – Attis in fact – born from the “surrogate womb” of a daughter of the river Sangarius. And it is precisely Agdistis, a castrated hermaphrodite, who has a key role in the myth¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷⁵ A later reform in the imperial period (probably in the time of Claudius) subdivided the power among ten “Attis” priests for life, all of them Roman citizens (five Phrygian and five Galatian) under the supervision of an *archiereus*. Carcopino 1941, pp. 76ff., thinks that in this way the castration of the high priests was terminated. According to Mitchell 1993, pp. 47-50, this was assisted by the admission of Galatian elements to the office of high priest and must have happened in the previous period. Further proof of the discontinuation of eunuchism was the existence among the “ten” of a father and son (Strubbe 1984, pp. 221 nn. 17 and 18). These transformations imply deep changes with the organization of the priests but in my opinion they do not imply negation of the preceding antidynastic model. As far as I can tell, in fact, the office was not passed from father to son (Roller 1997, p. 544, has a different opinion). Finally, it is probable that alongside the “Romanised” clergy in the imperial period there was a sort of subordinate priesthood comprising Galli and presided over by a “archigallus” (cf. Lambrechts – Bogaert 1969, pp. 408-411). Cf. also J. and L. Robert 1970, pp. 463-464.

¹⁷⁶ Unlike the “Phrygian” version of the myth, in the epigraphic evidence Agdistis is a goddess with benevolent and healing traits (for example, cf. the long inscription from Philadelphia discussed in Barton – Horsley 1981). For documentation and philological discussion of the name see the bibliographical references in ch. 1 note 11. The name in question must go back to the Balkans where the suffix -ist- occurs in female personal names (Gusmani 1958, p. 923 and Innocente 1997, p. 39); for documentation on Agdistis cf. Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 35-37 (previous bibliography); Borgeaud 1996, p. 213 n. 31.

Through the mediation of the almond tree that grew from his excised genitals, Attis is born without a father, which deprives him of any possible reference to a lineage: Attis is the first in the most absolute sense.

But if the motif of “miraculous birth” is a recurrent element in myths that establish newly-weds and/or legitimise possible usurpers, not so common – and in fact never emphasised – is the circumstance that in this myth, still through the mediation of Agdistis, Attis is also the last. In fact, castration annuls the possibility of a transfer of office, in this case, the office of the Great Mother’s “favourite”, by heredity. Could not this version of the myth, then, found the very institution of theocracy at Pessinous whose high priest was called none other than Attis?

My hypothesis starts from the fact that in Phrygia, Attis was originally linked with the monarchy, which in turn was connected with the cult of Cybele/Agdistis/Great Mother. The dissolution of the Phrygian monarchy and the growth of political autonomy in the sacred city of Pessinous are reflected in the “Phrygian” version of the myth. As soon as the Phrygian monarchy no longer existed, they wished to found a new “dynastic” model in the sacred city of Pessinous by means of this myth, a priestly model based on sterility and the non-hereditary transfer of office, while retaining the royal funerary cult: Attis is the priest in Pessinous, but he is also an “anti-king”.

In this historical process of adaptation, the burial of Attis and the funerary cult offered him do not comprise the only element of continuity with the preceding mythical and ritual tradition. Also preserved is the ancient theme of a goddess’ exclusive love for the youth, which while negative in respect of the existence of man and his normal biological life, allows death to be the door for entry to “deification”¹⁷⁷. Attis the shepherd dies, whether king, or priest or both together, and then Attis the god/hero is born¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁷ Seen in this perspective, the death of Attis is a sad but also on the whole a “just” event, as is confirmed by the fact that the blood spilt by him in this version, unlike the account by Diodorus, generates instead of being corrupted. On the other hand, the Mother of the gods, according to Arnobius, knows the fate of Attis and knows that in order to be “safe” he must never marry. Bursting into the city during the wedding she allows Agdistis to make Attis insane and be driven to suicide. Thus the death of Attis is not accidental but planned and intended by the Great Mother, who only in this way can “save him”.

¹⁷⁸ Of interest in this connection is the translation recorded by Damascius concerning Esmounos (Eshmun), which has been seen as a late orientalising (Phoenician) version of the “Phrygian” myth (so Borgeaud 1996, p. 203 n. 101). To escape the

In conclusion, the interpretation proposed here – allowing for its hypothetical nature due to the restricted documentation – seems to be the one that best takes into account, fairly organically, a series of themes and elements that otherwise would remain without adequate explanation. In particular, the function of the cult of Attis in the period of theocracy in Pessinous would remain uncertain if it were not interpreted as a heroic-royal cult, even though *sui generis*, founded by none other than the “Phrygian” version of the myth.

2.5. *Hunting myths and kingship*

The “Lydian” version of Attis, in which the youth is killed by a wild boar, and which appears to be a complex “re-written” version of an earlier “hunting myth” that is its nucleus, seems instead to be connected to “royal” ideology, as shown by the numerous parallels from the ancient Near East.

The purpose of hunting myths, born within societies of hunter-gatherers, as is known, is chiefly to provide the basis for the rules that govern hunting: which part of the prey is due to the “Master/Mistress of the animals”, the correct way to eat game, the prohibitions or rules that must be observed in order to be successful in an activity that has strong sacred connotations, and so on. In the cultures of settled farmers, such myths can continue to exist, but their function is altered in order to express new content using ancient language¹⁷⁹. In this domain, hunting – as it is the case in real life – is by now the prerogative of nobles, especially chiefs, princes or kings¹⁸⁰. The essential elements of a hunting myth, in considerably revised form, are certainly to be traced in the episode of Adrastus and Atys as recorded by Herodotus, and in the other documentation it appears with further reinterpretations. Hepding acknowledged the antiquity of the account in Herodotus, but noted that it “erst durch eine spätere Ver-

attentions of the goddess Astronoe, the young hunter castrates himself using an axe. The goddess, it is said, gives him back the warmth of life and makes him into a god. Here it is not a question of resurrection but of a transformation to be understood as a “deification”, which has to pass through the death of Esmounos to grant him birth in a dimension that is no longer human (cf. Xella 2001a and 2001b).

¹⁷⁹ Chirassi Colombo 1968; Piccaluga 1974, pp. 77-94; Xella 1976, pp. 61-91 and Xella 1978; Bremmer 1979, pp. 106-108; Ribichini 1981, pp. 108-123.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Xella 1976, pp. 90-91.

schmelzung des Gottes mit dem syrischen Adonis entstanden sei”¹⁸¹. For Will it was “une forme très laïcisée” of the Lydian version¹⁸². Sfameni Gasparro seems to be of the same opinion, as she considers the account in Herodotus to be an “euhemeristic version of the myth, the so-called “Lydian” version”¹⁸³. Borgeaud agrees with Gow in accepting that there is a connection between the mythical episode of the wild boar killing Attis and the account in Herodotus¹⁸⁴. The position adopted by Roller, though, seems to be isolated: “Herodotos’s account (...) is cast in the form of a folktale (note its similarity to the myth of Adonis, the young lover of Aphrodite, also killed by a boar), and it seems more likely that both Herodotos and Pausanias were drawing on folktale motifs than that Herodotos was describing cult ritual”¹⁸⁵. As for myself, I consider that the account in Herodotus is essential evidence for reconstructing the “history” of Attis. A close reading of the account shows that the nucleus of the narrative is not the episode of the wild boar, which is only one aspect of it, but rather the motif of hunting in general.

As anticipated above, it is precisely to the oldest hunting myths and their reinterpretations in cereal growing societies that one must look for some light on the “Attis enigma”. Behind some traditions and variants of the Attis myth, in fact, it is also possible to detect traces of a hunting myth. Those parts of it have been retained and recast that can suitably express the values peculiar to a society now very different from the one within which the original myth was produced. If it is now correct to refer to Adonis for the obvious parallels between the two events, on the other hand it must be remembered that he is only one of the many characters with whom a comparison can be established. Other comparisons – perhaps even more appropriate – can in fact be drawn with various “heroic” figures of the ancient Near East and of Greece¹⁸⁶. Another important aspect that must duly be taken into account in the comparison is that it cannot be applied simplisti-

¹⁸¹ Hepding 1903, p. 101.

¹⁸² Will 1960, p. 109.

¹⁸³ Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 28, n. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Borgeaud 1996, p. 196 n. 2; Gow 1960, p. 93.

¹⁸⁵ Roller 1999, p. 245 n. 25; the name Atys was used because it was “typically” Phrygian or peculiar to the ruling house.

¹⁸⁶ Hunting myths are very widespread in hero mythology cf. Piccaluga 1974, pp. 77-94, Xella 1976, pp. 61-91, and also, more generally, Brelich 1958 and 1977; Vidal-Naquet 1981 and 1986. On certain similarities between the Attis hunting episode and Greek traditions about Meleager cf. Bremmer 1988, especially p. 48.

cally, presupposing for example an Adonis-type myth, born from a more or less harmonious fusion of several traditions, and then comparing it with an Attis-type of the same genre. They are characters who, over space and time, had undergone profound changes. The sources for them often come from “rationalising” milieus such as speculative philosophy or Christianity, which must be carefully evaluated before being used for religio-historical research. In the same way, the “hunting myth” concealed behind the different versions of the Attis myth seems to have been “recast” for different functions and purposes.

In the light of these considerations, Roller’s analysis seems only partly to have hit the target. If, on the one hand, it correctly unlooses the account in Herodotus from the one by Hermesianax (Pausanias), deriving both, perhaps from a single earlier myth, on the other hand it undervalues the actual similarities between the two stories (principally the shared name) deriving them too hastily from a folktale without any connections to a cultic context. This also implicitly deprives the accounts in question of any religious connotation¹⁸⁷.

We must now analyse the various traditions about Attis in order to verify the possible presence of traces of a “hunting myth”, the exact sequence of which we cannot reconstruct today. We can only reconstruct its successive revisions that have contributed to the formation of a radically transformed account in both structure and function. In fact, the social and cultural context in which the mythical traditions about Attis were created is clearly a context in which hunting is no longer the primary element of subsistence. Thus, hunting becomes an activity for princes and kings and not specifically for the purpose of obtaining food, and is the prerogative of “nobles” that distinguishes them from the common people who devoted themselves to agriculture instead. The link between Attis and hunting that can take on different and at times even conflicting guises, as we shall see, seems then to be a further indication of his ancient royal “nature”.

In this perspective, the first evidence to consider is the account by Herodotus¹⁸⁸. It must be remembered that the Attis episode is set in the wider context of an account of the life and adventures of Croesus. These, in turn, are dependent on an event that took place four gener-

¹⁸⁷ On a similar attitude of scholars to the myths of Aqhat and Kešši, see the apposite remarks by Xella 1976, p. 62 and Xella 1978, pp. 217-218.

¹⁸⁸ Herod., I 34-45.

ations previously. It is Gyges' assassination of Candaule/Myrsilos that marks the shift in Lydia from the Heraclid dynasty to the Mermnad dynasty. As Croesus is the "victim" of Gyges' guilt, so Atys seems to be "victim" of his father's guilt. But the guilt staining Croesus is not exactly specified. Herodotus himself does not seem to know exactly the cause of the misfortune and has his own supposition: "the divine anger fell heavily on Croesus: as I guess, because he himself supposed to be blest beyond all other men"¹⁸⁹. Certainly, of itself *hybris* could already be a serious fault, but Croesus accumulates others, one of which in particular seems to be connected with an older "hunting myth". I think that for a better understanding of Croesus' fault and the (involuntary) faults of his son Atys and of their connections with an earlier "hunting myth", a comparison with an ancient hunting myth of Hurrian origin, though it is known to us only through the Hittite version, is important. It is the myth of Kešši, especially significant for our purposes precisely because of its Anatolian origin. In fact it is possible to trace in it elements specifically linked to the society of hunters that produced it, even if its revision clearly loaded it with new symbolic values.

The story of Kešši can be summarised as follows¹⁹⁰. Kešši is a hunter who, after getting married, forgets his "duties": he does not perform the sacrifices due to the gods and no longer goes hunting in the mountains. This latter failing is judged to be extremely serious in that it has as a consequence not only losses at the economic level but also on the level of personal prestige. He is punished by the disappearance of game. There then follows a series of dreams and their interpretation by the hero's mother. Unfortunately, we do not know the ending of the narrative due to the text being broken.

Some of the elements of this story, meagre as it is, show clear similarities with the Atys story not only from the aspect of narrative but also – and this is particularly important for analysis in terms of the history of religions – from the aspect of function. First of all we can consider Kešši's role of "hunter", about which it has been said that it fits well "dans une sphère idéologique qui – pendant le Bronze Récent – considère la chasse comme une activité noble et royale; l'habilité de chasseur est une qualité presque indispensable à ceux qui

¹⁸⁹ Herod., I 34, trad. A.D. Godley, in Godley 1960, p. 41.

¹⁹⁰ For the interpretation of this myth I follow Xella 1978, cf. more recently Neu 1993; Wilhelm 1999.

occupent les places les plus hautes de la hiérarchie humaine”¹⁹¹. This can be compared with the proud defence by Attis of fighting and hunting: ““Father”, said the young man, “it was formerly held fairest and noblest that we princes should go constantly to war and the chase and win thereby renown; but now you have barred me from both of those, not for any sign you have seen in me of a coward or craven spirit. With what face can I thus show myself whenever I go to and from the market-place? What will the men of the city think of me, and what my new-wedded wife? With what manner of man will she think that she dwells?””¹⁹².

Both in the myth of Kešši and the story of Atys in Herodotus, the cultural context, where hunting is equated with nobility, is the same. They are sublimated in the ideal of the “perfect king” whose return to the city empty-handed is equivalent to losing honour itself. In the face of such a danger even the possible risk of losing one’s life shifts to the background¹⁹³.

In both cases the hard kernel of the story is a fault connected with hunting which is neglected on account of a woman. In the case of Kešši, the responsibility falls exclusively on him whereas in the case of Atys it is Croesus who “sins” in an attempt to save his son from a tragic fate. For Atys, too, the wedding and the resulting neglect of hunting must have been the “original” fault that had to be punished. But, just as for Kešši, in the case of Atys also this disobedience, in a different cultural context from the one of a society of hunter-gatherers, is no longer sufficient reason for incurring divine wrath. Hence the need for multiplying the causes of the divine anger or for a different reason for the punishment¹⁹⁴.

Kešši is punished by the disappearance of game, a “typical” motif of hunting myths prior to cereal farming. At first blush the end of Atys seems, instead, to evade the “logic” of a hunting myth. Yet, taking into account that what we have is a considerably revised form of the myth, in my view it is still possible to extract some elements from its earliest nucleus. In fact we find there the same negative relationship

¹⁹¹ Xella 1978, p. 224.

¹⁹² Herod., I 37, transl. A.D. Godley, in Godley 1960, p. 45.

¹⁹³ Cf. Xella 1978, p. 224, who correctly ascribes the same ideology to the Ugaritic myth about prince Aqhat.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Xella 1978, p. 220. In the case of Kešši there is the additional motive of neglecting the sacrifices to the gods; as for Atys, there comes into play a series of references to previous faults (the pride of Croesus, the transgression of Gyges).

between hunting and woman, as in the myth of Kešši, represented by the marriage that weakens the hunter or makes him impure. In the account in Herodotus (fairly predictably) there is instead no trace of the Master/Mistress of the animals, that is, of the extra-human person who was considered to have been offended by the rules of hunting not being followed. However, it cannot be denied that the death of Atys appears as a very real divine punishment, even if the “political” features with which it is portrayed conceal those connected with hunting. This is what I think emerges from comparing the components and functions of Atys and of his assassin, Adrastus. The latter, who actually carried out the offended divine will, is presented as a sort of “double” of Atys, similar but his opposite. Both are the sons of kings but, whereas Atys is portrayed as a “perfect son”, Adrastus is instead, pursued by misfortune. The former is loved too much by his father: Croesus considers him as his only son, even though Atys has a brother¹⁹⁵. The latter, instead, is rejected by his father on the day when he accidentally kills his brother. Lastly, both are hunters and for both life ends with failure precisely during a hunt. Atys, “the perfect hunter”, ends up being “hunted” and is thus transformed into prey. Adrastus, whose name transparently betrays his function of “instrument of fate”, is also a “failed” hunter as he lacks prey and ends up “hunting” a man. He finally ends his own existence by taking his own life on the tomb of his “prey”¹⁹⁶.

From this analysis comes proof that the account about Atys in Herodotus is to be considered not the “euhemeristic” version of the “Lydian” myth but, in fact, the fairly complex revision of an ancient hunting myth, collected by Herodotus and inserted into his lengthy description of the history of Croesus. However, it is very difficult to retrace the various layers and reinterpretations of the myth and especially to determine how much Herodotus himself contributed to the account in the form in which he presents it. In the account by Herodotus this hunting myth can still be perceived both in the episode of the boar hunt, and in the contrast drawn between hunting and the institution of marriage, at least in respect of its sexual implica-

¹⁹⁵ On the two sons of Croesus and the meaning to be assigned to both characters according to a semiotic reading of the episode in Herodotus cf. Sebeok – Brady 1979.

¹⁹⁶ Connections between this story and the “mythical model of hunting” had also been proposed by Mora 1986, pp. 139-142, but I can agree neither with the presuppositions of his interpretation (initiation) nor with his conclusions (lack of virility and effeminacy of the hero).

tions, as preventing one's own hunting duties from being successfully carried out. In that account, and presumably in the source that he used, the ancient hunting myth is accepted and used as the basis for the model behaviour of which the story of Croesus and no longer of Atys is presented as paradigmatic. One must behave with humility so as not to incur divine vengeance, accepting one's own fate in every instance¹⁹⁷.

And as for the name of the son of Croesus, Roller's supposition that Atys was a name chosen by Herodotus to give the story a "Phrygian" colouring¹⁹⁸ seems very unlikely to me. More probable instead is the alternative hypothesis, given in a note, that precisely because it was a royal name it would have been repeated in the Lydian dynasty¹⁹⁹.

The "Lydian" version comprises, besides the information in Herodotus, three other documents, although they are not at all similar.

The connection with an ancient hunting myth emerges quite clearly in the tradition recorded by Pausanias (*Hermesianax*)²⁰⁰ which recounts how Attis joined a hunting party with tragic consequences. In that tradition the motifs of hunting and the priesthood are connected. Here, two different motifs are superimposed, as can be deduced from the fact that Zeus, wishing to suppress Attis, a sterile priest and presumably, therefore, not very "virile", created the setting of the boar hunt, clearly not an ideal testing ground for him but suited, instead to real men of royal blood. It is probably the result of contamination of the motif of the unfortunate prince and the motif of the priest who moved from Phrygia to Lydia, both of which occur in the dossier on Attis.

Plutarch mentions two persons called Attis, one a Syrian and the other an Arcadian, both killed by a boar, but provides no further information²⁰¹.

¹⁹⁷ Research on this topic would be interesting as it could derive from Egyptian influence on Herodotus. On the Egyptian idea of fate as compared with fate in Syrian and Mesopotamian culture cf. Xella 1999.

¹⁹⁸ "Herodotos may have named the young man Atys simply because, to a Greek, especially one who was a native of Anatolia, as Herodotos was, this was the prototypical Anatolian name" (Roller 1999, p. 245).

¹⁹⁹ Roller 1999, p. 245 and n. 25.

²⁰⁰ Fr. 8 Powell, pp. 105-106 = Paus., VII 17, 9.

²⁰¹ Plut., *Sert.* 1, 4.

According to the tradition recorded by the scholiast of Nicander²⁰², the Great Mother's preference for Attis and his devotion to the goddess unleash the jealousy of Zeus, who sends the killer boar. Here the hunting episode seems to remain in the background and the story refers instead to the well-known motif of the dire consequences implied by a love relationship between a goddess and a human being²⁰³. The intervention by Zeus comprises the "return to normality", as it sanctions the separation between the two levels, a motif that also occurs widely in various hunting myths.

The episode of the boar hunt is completely absent from the "Phrygian" version, where Attis is instead described as unsuccessful both as hunter and as husband. This happens because in the "Phrygian" version of the myth, Attis is called on to be the prototypical anti-royalist model. The hunt, in this "reversed" perspective of the monarchy as a model, becomes devalued: it is not by chance that the version in Arnobius provides a real account of a hunt "in reverse"²⁰⁴. Agdistis hunts and fills the game-bag of Attis, who then boasts that it was he who had such success. The world of "civilised" men to whom, when intoxicated, he ends up telling the truth, judges his relationship with Agdistis to be shameful and suggests that the youth should marry as a "way of escape" from the wild²⁰⁵. Exactly as in the myth of Kešši and in the story in Herodotus, here too union with a woman has to be understood as a "fault", a transgression of the rules that govern the world of hunting and that Attis, by agreeing to marry, violates irreparably.

Thus in the "Phrygian" version as well, there is a trace of an earlier hunting myth, although it has been transformed and revised in terms of royalty, and with the dissolution of the monarchy it was revised yet again with an anti-royalist meaning.

In this connection the song 63 by Catullus is worth mentioning. Among the various interpretations provided by scholars, of particular interest is the one that connected it with the widespread mythological motif of the unsuccessful transition from adolescence to adulthood²⁰⁶. The Attis episode reported by Catullus is to be included within the set of those who reject civilised life – particularly marriage – and whose

²⁰² Schol. in v. 8 Geymonat a, p. 32.

²⁰³ For the antiquity of this motif see Piccaluga 1974, pp. 9-35; Xella 1976, p. 90.

²⁰⁴ Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 6.

²⁰⁵ For example, cf. the well-known case of Enkidu in Mesopotamian traditions.

²⁰⁶ Strauss Clay 1995.

relationship (or violation of that relationship) with a *pōtnia thērōn* determines their destruction. The hunting motif would be recognisable from the fact that in the *carmen* Attis is “hunted” by the lion sent by the Great Mother. The failure of the transition to adulthood is evident from the refusal of marriage and of the responsibilities connected with it, and as a consequence the acquisition of a permanent ambiguity of gender. In the song by Catullus, whatever interpretation one may wish to give it, the motifs of hunting, failed marriage and the dramatic relationship between Attis and the Great Mother are also present²⁰⁷.

²⁰⁷ More recent studies that also incorporate previous bibliography include Takács 1996; Lefèvre 1998; Roller 1999, pp. 305-307.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CLASSICAL WORLD: GREECE AND ROME

3.1. *Attis and Greece*

So far, analysis of the sources – especially the genealogical lists and the account by Diodorus Siculus – has indicated the probable existence, at least from the 7th or 8th century BCE, of a mythical tradition about Attis that, in continuity with the earliest Anatolian traditions concerning royalty and its role as an intermediary with the divine sphere, helped to provide legitimacy for the Mermnad dynasty in the government of Lydia and Phrygia.

Another significant fact that has become apparent from the research is the probable role assumed by the sanctuary of Pessinous and its history in the formation of an alternative mythical paradigm to the paradigm of Attis/the king. On the basis of current knowledge it is not possible to determine precisely the various phases through which the sanctuary and priesthood of Pessinous acquired the characteristics of a “temple-state” governed by a theocracy. However, this was the state of affairs in the Attalid period¹.

We shall now examine the documents concerning the presence of Attis in the classical world in order to verify possible elements of either continuity or innovation with respect to what has been established for Asia Minor.

It should be emphasised above all that documentation for the cult of Attis in Greece does not correspond to evidence for the introduction of the cult of the Mother of the gods². However, it is useful to consider, even if briefly, the salient characteristics of her cult in Greece, before turning to consider Attis.

Attention has been drawn to the two faces that the Great Mother

¹ This is attested in the 2nd century BCE by the correspondence between the supreme priests of Pessinous and the Attalid kings; see Welles 1934, pp. 241-253 nn. 55-61; Virgilio 1981; Strubbe 1984, pp. 218-219 nn. 1-7. On the Attalid kingship cf. most recently Virgilio 1993.

² For the introduction of the cult of the Mother of the gods in Greece (and Athens) cf. particularly Così 1980-1981; Cerri 1983; Graf 1984; Frapiccini 1987; Versnel 1990, pp. 105-111.

exhibits in Greece, possibly due to a special relationship – of opposition but also of agreement – established between two different deities: in fact, an ancient indigenous goddess seems to have been reevaluated by the introduction of the cult of the foreign goddess with whom she was ideally identified³. This would explain why the Great Mother was attributed both the role of guarantor of justice and good government⁴ and those orgiastic features of her cult that emerge from the evidence provided by Pindar⁵, Diogenes Tragicus⁶, Euripides⁷ and Rhianus of Crete⁸.

The situation seems to have been at least partly the same in Rome. In both cases a distinction was made between the official, institutionalised aspects of the cult and those instead considered to be subversive and “foreign”. That would explain the need for her “duplication” and the assimilation and/or opposition with/to various historical models of the “great goddess” (Demeter, Ceres, etc.)⁹.

The retinue accompanying the Great Mother in Greece seems to comprise either groups such as the Curetes, the Corybantes, the Cabiri and the Nymphs¹⁰ or characters arranged in triads: the Dioscuri – goddess; Hermes – bearded man – goddess; Hermes (or boy with *oinochoē*) – girl carrying torch (Hecate?) – goddess; to these can be added Hecate and Pan¹¹. Some of these characters confirm the orgiastic context of the Greek cult given to the Great Mother, performed at night and encouraged by the sound of sacred instruments, with the characteristic frenzied dancing and shouts of the participants¹².

³ Borgeaud 1996, pp. 31-55.

⁴ The Athenian *mētrōon*, erected near the βουλευτήριον, had the function of state archive, cf. Borgeaud 1996, p. 31.

⁵ Pind., *Dithyr.* 2, fr. 70.

⁶ TrGF² 45 F 1 (*Semele*).

⁷ Eur., *Helen* vv. 1301-1369. On the very special character of *Helen*'s chorus, where Demeter is represented with features usually typical of the Great Mother, see Sfameni Gasparro 1978; Cerri 1983 and 1986-1987.

⁸ Rhianus Cret., *Anth. Palat.*, VI 173 = Gow – Page a, Rhianus 7, p. 176.

⁹ Brelich 1985, pp. 136-137, stressed that the double face ascribed to the foreign gods is the consequence of a typical Hellenistic process already operative in the classical period. At the core of the orgiastic rituals – whose mystical background expresses a protest against the civic religion – there is a group of gods considered as an alternative to those venerated in the official cults. These rituals are “re-absorbed” by the society, which canalises their subversive potentialities within the limits established by a series of rules. This kind of “adoption” of foreign gods cannot be achieved without the (partial) loss of their original characters.

¹⁰ Strab. X 3, 7-13.

¹¹ On related iconographical, literary and epigraphical sources, see Sfameni Gasparro 1973, pp. 135-144; 1978; 1996; also Will 1960.

For the oldest period, in Greece, there is no evidence of any type of institutional priesthood connected with the Great Mother¹³. Instead, the presence of itinerant “priests”, with various names, is documented in several sources. However, they do not seem to enjoy great social prestige since in the texts known to us they are often accused of being charlatans and impostors¹⁴.

However, a different situation emerges from the epigraphic evidence from Piraeus¹⁵, the seat of a *mētrōon* and of a private association connected with the cult of the Great Mother as early as the 4th century BCE¹⁶. For us this association is of primary importance, because from it came the relief with an inscription which provides the first evidence for an image of Attis and written reference to him. This relief¹⁷, dated between the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 3rd¹⁸, shows a seated male to whom a female – easily identifiable as the Great Mother – is offering a cup. Both characters seem to be the same size, which is evidence that they are equal in rank, as the inscription confirms. In this votive inscription the dedicator addresses “Agdistis and Attis”. Although the mention of Agdistis clearly refers to a “foreign” dimension of the cult, the context in which it occurred, however, is still rather obscure¹⁹. L.E. Roller considers the scene

¹² On the groups of deities that follow the goddess, Borgeaud remarks that they live in a dimension “à la fois rituelle et mythologique: ces noms désignent en effet aussi bien des titulaires de sacerdoces ou membres d’associations religieuses que des acolytes divins dans les récits concernant les dieux”, (Borgeaud 1996, p. 60). Will understands the dancing *kourai* in Pindarus (*III Pith.*) as the mythical Nymphs (Will 1960, p.104).

¹³ The episode of self-emasculation in Athens in 415 BCE (Plut. *Nic.* 13, 2) can not be used as proof of the existence of eunuchs devoted to the Great Mother. According to the Plutarchean text, it was an isolated act of a fanatic individual, related to a specific historical event (the departure of the great expedition to Sicily). That is, it is an act that does not belong in the context of a regular cult. In addition, this man castrated himself on the altar of the Twelve Gods. No connection with Great Mother’s ceremonies can be inferred from this document. See Roller 1994, p. 256; Borgeaud 1996, p. 200 n. 48.

¹⁴ Cf. Borgeaud 1996, pp. 60-64, who quotes sources as well as bibliography.

¹⁵ Cf. Ferguson 1944; Garland 1987, pp. 129-131; 235-237 n. 80-94.

¹⁶ This is the *communis opinio* of the scholars beginning with Ferguson (Ferguson 1944); *contra*, however, Roller who bases her opinion on the analysis of the personal names attested in the inscriptions, and maintains that “the cult’s membership as a whole reflects the varied population of the Piraeus, but it does not suggest a cult that appealed primarily to non-Greeks” (Roller 1999, p. 219).

¹⁷ Vermaseren 1977-1989, II, n. 308.

¹⁸ Cf. Roller 1994.

¹⁹ The cult of Agdistis at Rhamnous in the 1st century BCE may also have been imported by foreigners, possibly mercenaries, cf. Borgeaud 1996, pp. 49-50.

depicted in the relief as emblematic evidence for Attis changing from human to divine rank²⁰. There is no doubt that the scene emphasises a close relationship between the two characters depicted, even if, in my view, it is not easy to reconstruct the kind of bond that links them and the ideological context of the picture.

Other inscriptions from Piraeus, which date from the 3rd century BCE to the end of the imperial period, provide additional important information on the organisation of the cult. Of particular interest are the inscriptions dated between 284 and 246 BCE, supplying evidence of a change in the organisation of the association connected with the cult of the Great Mother. During this period the *orgeōnes* are mentioned instead of the *thiasoi* in the cultic organisation, which means that the city of Athens took charge of the cult. The management of the cult was entrusted each year to a priestess who was appointed to the office by lot and was supported by some overseers, a treasurer and a secretary²¹.

Two of the various decrees of the *orgeōnes* seem especially important because they provide, albeit in cryptic form, some information about the cult. The first decree deals with the preparation of a κλίνη, that is a pallet, in “both the Ἀττίδεια”²². The second, instead, mentions “two thrones”²³. Understandably, the passages in question have attracted the attention of scholars who have tried to interpret the meagre references it contains. It is believed that the two decrees refer to the same ceremonies of which the *Attideia* were two different festivals or else two phases of the same festival²⁴. The reference to “goddesses” in the plural²⁵ in one of the decrees poses further problems concerning the content and performance of the actual ritual²⁶. The term ἀγερμός, that occurs in the

²⁰ The object given by Agdistis to Attis is identified by Roller as “a small trefoil jug”. It could symbolise the advancement of the young Attis from attendant of the Great Mother to divine being (Roller 1994, p. 256). In fact, the real nature of this object is far from being clear. According to Così 1976, p. 46, it is a flower; Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 25, n. 24, too thinks that it is a flower, but not without considerable doubt; according to Vermaseren 1977, p. 35, it is instead a small terracotta vase, the meaning of which, however, is very uncertain.

²¹ Cf. Ferguson 1944; Vermaseren 1977-1989, II, pp. 68-69; Borgeaud 1996, pp. 46-47.

²² Hepding 1903, pp. 79-80, n. 9 = Vermaseren 1977-1989, II, n. 262.

²³ Hepding 1903, pp. 80-81, n. 10 = Vermaseren 1977-1989, II, n. 263.

²⁴ Cf. Hepding 1903, pp. 136-137.

²⁵ Hepding 1903, pp. 79-80, n. 9 = Vermaseren 1977-1989, II, n. 262.

²⁶ Borgeaud 1996, pp. 46-48, hypothesises that the two goddesses may represent the double character of the Great Mother. A duplication of this kind could also be confirmed by the dedication inscribed on a votive statue of the 4th century BCE and by the typical iconography of the double *naiskoi*.

other decree²⁷, refers to a collection. It was emended by P. Foucart, on the basis of a gloss in Hesychius, to ἄγρυμός, which then allowed the hypothesis that the inscription referred to a mystery context²⁸. Against this interpretation, Hepding has compared another inscription from Piraeus in which the term used is unmistakably ἄγερμός²⁹.

From the scant but important documentation from Piraeus in the period between the 4th and 2nd centuries BCE, that is before or contemporary with the golden age of the temple state of Pessinous, we can deduce the existence there of an imported cult of the Great Mother. We are unable to reconstruct its characteristics exactly, but Attis must also have had some role in it. Whatever the context may have been in which the pallets and thrones mentioned in the decree were used³⁰, it remains unknown, even if the two fundamental aspects of Attis found in Phrygia, that is the regal and funerary aspects, cannot be excluded *a priori*³¹. To add another would only be to risk conjecture³².

Even so, the very lack of information suggests that in Piraeus a cult was carried out that, while recognised by the state, still remained essentially private. Also, the presence of a priestess reveals a type of cultic organisation that differs from the one in Pessinous which, even in respect of the Roman cult, always retains characteristics of its own that cannot be exported, as is shown more clearly below.

These, then, are the oldest epigraphic and iconographic sources from mainland Greece. As for literary evidence, of particular interest is a set of epigrams in the *Anthologia Palatina*, the earliest of which go

²⁷ Hepding 1903, p.80-81, n.10 = Vermaseren 1977-1989, II, n. 263.

²⁸ Foucart 1873, p. 97.

²⁹ The evidence from Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* II 19, 2) is not decisive enough to prove the existence of Metroac mysteries on the basis of the term ἄγρυμός. As a matter of fact, this term is only attested in a manuscript, in a context which could suggest orgiastic rites (the *agyroi* are listed among the kinds of behaviour considered foreign to Roman religious sensibilities, together with *theophorēsis*, *korybantismos*, *baccheia* and “secret initiations”), but the other manuscripts use the term ἄγερμός. In any case, there is no direct relationship to the Metroac cult. A little later, Dionysius, referring to the τῆς Ἰδαίας ἱερά, affirms that they required a “collect” (*Ant. Rom.* II 19, 3-5).

³⁰ They have been interpreted as objects connected to an enthronement of the devotee and as referring to the *thronōsis* of the Corybantic mysteries. Also two Orphic texts mention the enthronement in a Metroac milieu: 223d Kern (=175) and the Orphic hymn 27 (cf. Cosi 1976, p. 46).

³¹ If the κλίνη is interpreted as a pallet, instead of as a coffin, it could be an indication of a *hierogamia*; cf. Hepding 1903, pp. 136-137; Cosi 1976, pp. 46ff.

³² Cf. Cosi 1976, p. 45, who defines these rituals as “latamente misterici” on the basis of the use of the terms *orgeōnes* and *thiasōtai*.

back to the 3rd century BCE. In them we find for the first time that the priests of the Great Mother are called *galloi*.

As has been convincingly maintained, the two epigrams of Dioscorides are considered to be the earliest (end of the 3rd century BCE)³³. In particular, the later epigrams refer to the first one, so that it seems necessary to begin our analysis from that epigram. Certain similarities between the episode recorded in the epigram and the account of Hermesianax given in Pausanias³⁴ have been considered significant³⁵. In particular, it has been noticed that in both accounts the protagonist is a Phrygian priest called Atys who travels from Phrygia towards Lydia (from Pessinous to Sardis in the epigram) and that in both accounts there is an encounter between the priest and a wild animal (a boar or a lion), but the outcomes are completely different. In the first case, Atys dies but in the second he succeeds in driving the beast away by beating a tambourine.

I have already stressed that the first episode appears to be a sort of contamination between the motifs of the unlucky prince and of the wandering priest³⁶, the latter typical of the priesthood of the Great Mother since very ancient times³⁷. I wonder whether in the account recorded by Dioscorides, beyond the obvious projection into the myth of cultic elements (the founding of a *thalamē*, the link between the Galli and their own tools, offerings of hair, etc.)³⁸ it is possible to trace once again aspects of the dialectic between monarchy and priesthood that has emerged as a specific feature of the revision of Attis carried out in Pessinous around the 4th-3rd centuries BCE.

We can verify that hypothesis further. A Gallus called Atys, who is possessed, travels in a delirious state from Pessinous towards Sardis at dead of night. Recovering from the ecstatic trance, he seeks refuge in a cave. A lion, who was on his trail, reaches him and terrifies him. Inspired by a *daīmōn*, he then starts to beat his tambourine, putting

³³ *Anth. Pal.* VI 220 = Gow – Page a, Dioscorides 16, pp. 85-86; XI 195 = Gow-Page a, Dioscorides 36, p. 93. On the date, see Gow 1960, p. 88.

³⁴ Paus., VII 17, 9-12.

³⁵ Gow 1960, p. 93.

³⁶ Cf. p. 58.

³⁷ On the sources cf. Borgeaud 1996, pp. 60-64 and Roller 1997, pp. 545-546.

³⁸ From this point of view, the problem posed by Gow of explaining why the priest dedicates and immediately afterwards abandons the typical elements of his “Gallos-ship”, is no longer justified: it is a myth founding the “tools of the trade” of this category of sacral agents and, consequently, it is not necessary to justify logically an “after” that, from a correct mythical point of view, simply does not exist.

the beast to flight. Afterwards, Atys yells to the Mother his wish to consecrate a *thalamē* near the banks of the Sangarius and his tambourine.

The topic is taken up by other Hellenistic poets³⁹, and the Gallus gradually comes to lose his connection with Atys and offers other gifts to the goddess such as his clothes or his hair. However, of particular interest here is that in the version given by Dioscorides which, as we may remember, is the very earliest, we find support for the anti-royal dimension of the priest Atys. As already noted, what is perplexing in the account by Hermesianax (Pausanias) was the contradiction between the priestly dimension of Atys and his participation in the boar hunt, which referred to a royal dimension. This contradiction, that could have been due to the contamination of different mythical themes⁴⁰, now seems to be resolved in the epigram of Dioscorides. Atys is fully a priest and is now in total opposition to the royal and princely domain: the lion that follows him and causes "fear in brave men" (i.e. hunters/princes) is "an abominable anguish for a Gallus". This marks an unbridgeable chasm not only between normal men and the Galli but also between "brave men" (and who is braver than a king or prince?) and the priests of the Great Mother, of whom Atys is the prototype. In the version by Hermesianax, the priest Atys, who elects to hunt according to royal custom, is destined to fail, whereas in the epigram of Dioscorides, the priest who chooses the correct way of "hunting" the animal, that is by using his own tools, the tambourine, is crowned with success. This therefore supports that subtle dialectic that we found in the foundation myth of the theocracy of Pessinous: the supremacy of the priestly caste is based not simply on the negation of royalty but rather on the proposal of an "overturned model" that it absorbs and transforms. Atys the priest is not merely a non-king but an anti-king⁴¹.

A further cause for reflection comes from the body of evidence, all of it fairly late, concerning the introduction of the cult of the Anato-

³⁹ For reasons of style and content, scholars unanimously accept that the ascription of epigram 217 to Simonides, is unfounded. Some scholars consider it to be due to intentional fraud, others consider that it was due to scribal error, and others again consider it was due to the shifting of epigrams that previously were in a different position. Cf. Gow 1960, p. 88, with the relevant bibliography, and also Lane 1996, p. 119 n. 7.

⁴⁰ Cf. p. 58.

⁴¹ The motif of the encounter of Atys/Gallus with the lion is repeated in Catullus' c. 63, but in a revised form; cf. Fedeli 1980; Shipton 1987.

lian Great Mother to Athens. These traditions go back to an older source, although it is a later creation than the actual installation of the goddess in the *mētrōon* that lies alongside the Athenian *bouleutērion* (5th cent. BCE)⁴².

According to the account recorded by Photius (and in parallel passages by other authors)⁴³, a μητραγύρτης⁴⁴, having reached Athens, initiates the women into the mysteries of the Mother of the gods. The Athenian men kill him by throwing him head first into the βάραθρον. There follows an epidemic (more probably a famine)⁴⁵ that, according to the oracle consulted, was caused by the crime. The Athenians then build a βουλευτήριον in which they place the murdered priest. After fencing off the βουλευτήριον, they consecrate it to the Mother of the gods and erect a statue there to the μητραγύρτης. They then use the *mētrōon* as an archive and a deposit for the laws, while the βάραθρον is covered over.

Instead, the version recorded by Julian⁴⁶ mentions Gallus, a religious innovator who is not understood by the Athenians. They insult him and expel him from the town. In fact, they do not understand that the goddess he was introducing is the one whom they worship as Deo, Rhea and Demeter.

The account is repeated, with some interesting variations, by Suidas s.v. *barathron* (= the scholiast of Aristophanes)⁴⁷. Here the protagonist of the episode is a Phrygian priest who is killed by the Athenians for having predicted the arrival of the Mother in search of her daughter Kore. The goddess, angered by the murder, makes the land barren; in the end the filling in of the βάραθρον and sacrifices in her honour return matters back to normal.

Various hypotheses have been proposed concerning the date of these accounts and their historical accuracy. According to Cerri⁴⁸, the

⁴² Jul. *V or.* 159a-b; Photius s.v. μητραγύρτης 423 I Theodoritis, pp. 568-569 (= *Suid.* 1003 Adler III, p. 391; *Apost.*, 11, 34); *Suid.* s.v. βάραθρον, 99 Adler I, p. 453 (= *Schol. ad Aristoph. Plout.* 431); *Schol. ad Aeschin. In or.* III 187, Dindorf p. 96. On the problems more strictly connected to the temple, the installation of the Mother of the gods, and their date see the authors quoted in n. 2 (with previous bibliography) with the addition of Ruiz Pérez 1994.

⁴³ Photius s.v. μητραγύρτης 423 I Theodoritis, pp. 568-569 (= *Suid.* 1003 Adler III, p. 391; *Apost.*, 11, 34).

⁴⁴ I.e. a mendicant priest of the Great Mother.

⁴⁵ Cf. Frapiccini 1987, p. 14 and n. 9.

⁴⁶ Jul. *V or.* 159a-b.

⁴⁷ *Suid.* s.v. βάραθρον, 99 Adler I, p. 453 (= *Schol. ad Aristoph. Plout.* 431).

⁴⁸ Cerri 1983.

tradition about the *mētragyrtes* (quoted in Suidas, Photius and Apostolius) contains informations about topography and legal matters that would confirm its historical reliability⁴⁹. Additional and decisive evidence, again, according to Cerri, is the scholium to Aeschines⁵⁰, where it would seem that a historical source from the 4th cent. BCE is quoted. In this passage, the scholiast claims to have read in the *Philippika* that the Athenians constructed the *mētrōon* using part of the *bouleutērion* “because of that Phrygian”. According to Cerri, the author of the *Philippika* may be either Anaxymenes of Lampsacus or (less probably) Theopompus⁵¹.

Against Cerri’s interpretation, the following comments can be made.

First, traditions concerning the *mētragyrtes* are far from being exact, in terms of history, topography and legal content. The most important information given by Suidas, Photius and Apostolius, that women are the exclusive object of the initiatory predication (which Cerri does not discuss) does not appear in any other source. Furthermore, the information that the *barathron* was filled with earth should be interpreted as the end of this custom. It is and not, as Cerri supposes, to be understood as the transfer of the *barathron* from one place (*dēmos*) to another⁵². There is no explicit mention of this practice after 406 BCE, which means that this detail must be dated after the Macedonian period. Finally, we cannot assert that the text supplies exact information on legal matters (Cerri refers in particular to the treatment of the corpses of those who have been executed)⁵³. The fact that the corpses were left unburied is self-evident, since the very nature of the *barathron* (and the spirit of the punishment) did not allow funereal practices of any kind. It is not a question of a legal detail, but of an intuitive fact that could be known to a later source.

Second, it is difficult to be specific about the relationships between *bouleutērion* and *mētrōon* from the literary texts (there are inconsistencies and contradictions). The archaeological reconstruction may be well founded (and here Cerri is correct), but that is another matter. As yet we are unable to match the textual information to the archaeological finds.

⁴⁹ *Id.*, p. 161.

⁵⁰ *Schol. ad Aeschin. In or. III* 187, Dindorf p. 96.

⁵¹ *Id.*, p. 164.

⁵² *Id.*, p. 162.

⁵³ *Id.*, pp. 161-162.

Third, in the other documents about the *mētragyrtēs*, there are several contradictions in respect of the information transmitted by the first tradition. According to Suidas (s.v. *barathron*) and parallel sources, for example, the corpse of the *mētragyrtēs* lies in the *barathron*, and there is no reference to funereal practices, cult statues or the like. In addition, ritual appeasement of the goddess does not automatically imply that a cult was established there.

Fourth, as far as Julian is concerned, this is a sound philosophical reflection with no claim to exact historical allusions. In other words, this text does not provide any confirmation of Cerri's thesis. On the contrary, important details are omitted or differently narrated in comparison with the first source (Suidas, Photius and Apostolius)⁵⁴.

Finally, there is a basic fact that eliminates the very pivot of Cerri's thesis (an early date for the *mētragyrtēs* episode). Even if "that Phrygian" mentioned in the scholium to Aeschines were identical with the *mētragyrtēs* killed/banned by the Athenians, the *Philippika* quoted in this passage can not be attributed either to Anaxymenes or to Theopompus; in fact, the anonymous quotation of this work clearly speaks in favor of Demosthenes as its author, as Parker has argued, "(...) that phrase without citation of an author can surely only refer, as regularly in these and other scholia, to the *Philippics* of Demosthenes as read with a commentary; and since Demosthenes does not tell the story, we are back with a late antique commentary"⁵⁵.

In conclusion, the *mētragyrtēs* episode cannot be interpreted as a purely historical witness. Instead it exhibits the typical elements of a mythical account, that is, it looks like an *aition* founding the establishment of the Metroac cult on the Athenian *agora* and its narrow relationships (partial assimilation) to the cult of Demeter. This tradition is certainly late and the mythical character of the story is clearly shown

⁵⁴ See, for instance, the different destiny of the Gallus/*mētragyrtēs*, who was not killed but simply banned according to Julian: this eliminates the whole complex of consequences (sacrilege, purification rites, establishment of the sacred place in connection to this tomb, and so on). Note that, in terms of absolute chronology, Julian is the most ancient witness for these events. Even so, I must add that, according to a correct historico-religious method, this is not compelling.

⁵⁵ Parker 1996, p. 190 n. 137. In addition, also the translation of the verb *aneilon* by Cerri is doubtful, see the remarks of Parker, *ibid.*: "The argument that the story is based on a good knowledge of Attic *Realien* appears to founder on the claim in Photius that the Metroon was build on the spot where 'they killed' (*aneilon*) the *mētragyrtēs*, sc. over the quondam pit: Cerri's suggestion that the verb here in a Byzantine lexicographer, has the old technical sense of 'take up for burial' is inconvincing".

by the narrative cliché it employs, particularly the sequence: sacrilegious murder/divine wrath/negative consequences (famine, plague)/consultation of the oracle/burial of the innocent victim/foundation of a regular cult to the deity⁵⁶. It is a pattern that frequently recurs in our sources, as noted by Ruiz Pérez, who suggests dating the *mētragyrṭēs* episode to the Attalid period (3rd cent. BCE) on the evidence of the reference to the Delphic oracle in the version by Julian⁵⁷.

Versnel has instead recognised similarities between this account and the episode of the arrival in Rome of Battakes, the priest from Pessinous, in 102 BCE, because both exhibit the typical features of a “resistance myth”⁵⁸. Borgeaud, who also sees a similar narrative structure in both accounts, is doubtful of the possibility of perceiving a specific influence of one on the other, noting that “il sont tous deux issus du même moule culturel, dans lequel se mêlent, désormais indissolubles, traditions romaines, grecques et anatoliennes”⁵⁹.

Later I shall return to the Battakes episode, which must be read in the light of the system of values that Rome ascribed to mythical and ritual traditions about Attis, whereas here I shall examine the “Greek” account in more detail. As far as I know, sufficient emphasis has not been given to the similarities between the narrative in question and the installation of the cult of Attis and Cybele in Pessinous in the version recorded by Diodorus Siculus. In both the topic of the killing of an innocent person recurs⁶⁰; also the topic of cosmic disorder as the result of the anger of the goddess; the recourse to an oracle; the conclusion of the episode through correct funeral practice⁶¹; the erection of the victim’s statue; and lastly, the installation of a funereal cult contemporaneous with the cult of the goddess. Accordingly, I

⁵⁶ “The basic scheme of the story – transgression, calamity, consultation of the oracle, foundation of a cult – which is common to numerous cultural myths of Greece, would suffice by itself to tell us that we are not dealing with a historical happening” (Brelich 1969 a, p. 197, concerning the cult of *Dionysos Aigobolos* reported by Paus. IX 8, 2). See also Brelich 1959, pp. 247-248; Garland R. 1992, pp.152-170, but also Considine and others. For this interpretation, see also Ruiz Pérez 1994 and Borgeaud 1996, pp. 128-130; from the same point of view, any claim to date the famine precisely is unacceptable: the story is highly stereotyped and its purpose is to establish when, why and how – *illo tempore* – a cult of the Great Mother on the *agora* was founded.

⁵⁷ Ruiz Pérez 1994, p. 176.

⁵⁸ Versnel 1990, p. 105 n. 35.

⁵⁹ Borgeaud 1996, p. 130.

⁶⁰ In the Julian version of the tale the Athenians kill the priest because they do not know that the “new” cult that the priest wishes to introduce is, in fact, the “ancient”.

⁶¹ It is preceded by an incorrect praxis, since in both cases the corpse is unburied.

consider it probable that the account concerning the introduction of the cult of the Mother of the gods into Athens was modelled on the older accounts about the foundation of the royal cult of Attis in Pessinous, with the important transformation – which is evident given the different political and cultural context – of the royal prerogatives of the protagonist into priestly prerogatives. This transformation – if we date the composition of this narrative to the 3rd cent. BCE – has an exact equivalent in the reorganisation of the cult of the Great Mother in Pessinous itself, at the same time or a little earlier, that grants her priests a much more significant role both from the religious and political points of view. Thus it is no surprise that it is to a Gallus that the construction of the adjacent temple is ascribed and connected with what was the very symbol of Athenian democracy, the βουλευτήριον. In fact, being missionaries seems to have been one of the distinguishing features of the priesthood of the Great Mother since the earliest times⁶² and the foundation of a new sanctuary is attributed by Dioscorides specifically to the priest Atys.

On the other hand, the fact that this tradition makes use of a “stereotyped” model and shows “anachronisms”⁶³ does not mean that it has to be considered exclusively as a “literary” product. The “stereotype nature” of the account should rather be derived from a process of reshaping the myth within a situation different from the one that produced it and entails rethinking and “translating” its elements according to a “code” that can be understood by the culture that receives it. From the religio-historical viewpoint, then, there are no “anachronisms”, in that the myth does not intend to explain an historical event but rather to found it *a posteriori*, invoking all the elements useful to that end and without the need to arrange them according to “historical” logic. Thus the evidence from Julian, who projects Gallus back to a period before the 3rd cent. BCE, or from Photius, who ascribes the episode to a period before the institution of the Eleusinian mysteries, does not emphasise (as Ruiz Pérez claims), “le caractère tardif de la création du récit”⁶⁴, so much as its mythical significance. In the case of Julian, the purpose of the narrative is to link the entry of the Great Mother into Athens with the institute of

⁶² The “itinerant priests” of the Great Mother wandered through countries and cities, spreading their religious message and offering the people their special thaumaturgical abilities.

⁶³ Cf. Ruiz Pérez 1994, p. 174.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

the Galli. If then, as Ruiz Pérez himself maintains, the myth has to be dated to the 3rd cent. BCE, it is not even possible to speak of an anachronism in the strict sense, since at that time *μητραγύρτης* and *γάλλος* were virtually synonymous. The evidence provided by the Suda that the Eleusinian institution came prior to the Great Mother's entry into Athens, is intended to stress its ancestral nature and also its pre-cereal, and thus pre-political nature, so restating that subtle dialectic between the Great Mother and Demeter/Ceres that is found in various guises in both Greece and Rome, to be overcome, in Greece, only at the price of merging them to some extent.

*

Apart from the evidence from Piraeus, which is confined within "foreign" communities – even if under the control of the *polis* after the 2nd cent. BCE – and allowing for the enigmatic nature of the documentation (a relief, the reference to the *κλίνη* in the Attideia)⁶⁵, there is no

⁶⁵ Besides the previously described relief representing Agdistis and Attis and the decrees of the *orgeōnes*, we have to remember the evidence of Demosthenes (*De corona* 259-260), that is, like the previous evidence, difficult to explain. In fact it could quote Attis in the context of an Athenian "Dionysiac" ceremony during the 4th century BCE. The name 'Attis' may occur in one of the cries of the people attending the ceremony, while in another cry Sabazius may be named. According to Demosthenes, Aeschines, in his youth, took part in ceremonies directed by his mother Glaukothea. Demosthenes describes the ritual: in a first nocturnal phase, the initiates put on a fawn skin and drink wine from a krater. Then, sitting with their bodies soiled by a mixture of bran and mud, they see the priestess appear. Later on they stand up and wash themselves and finally cry: "I escaped the evil, I found the better!", while the bystanders begin shouting. During the diurnal phase, the *thiasos* passes through the Athenian streets, and the initiates, crowned with fennel and leaves of white poplar, lift hissing snakes above their heads, and dancing to the rhythm of the cries *εὐοῖ σαβοῖ* and *ὔης ἄτης ἄτης ὔης*, bring the *κίστη* and the *λίχνον*. It is very difficult to determine the exact meaning of the two sayings quoted. The Demosthenes' passage is mentioned also by Strabo (X 3, 18) who connects these ceremonies to the cult of both Sabazius and the Great Mother (cf. also the interpretations of the cries in *Λέξεις ῥητορικαί*, s.v. "Ἀτης ὔης" [Bekker I, p. 207], and in Michael Psellus, *τῶν ὀνομάτων τῶν δικῶν* [Boissonade, p. 109 = Lane 1985, II, *Testimonia antiqua* 33, p. 50]). While most scholars recognise in these cries the mention of Sabazius and Attis, not all agree that this evidence shows a special connection between the cult of Sabazius and the cult of Dionysus already present in Athens in the 5th – 4th centuries BCE (cf. Lane 1985, III, p. 3; Carpenter 1997, p. 77; Borgeaud 1996, p. 50). According to Borgeaud, the laconic nature of Demosthenes' remarks about the Phrygian cult could be intentional. Such a reluctance to give information about this cult can be found, according to him, in an inscription from Sardis that goes back to the Persian period. In this inscription it is forbidden for the priests of Zeus Baradates (Ahura Mazda) to take part in the mysteries of Sabazius and Agdistis: "Le culte phrygien n'est pas interdit, mais tenu à l'écart, contrôlé" (Borgeaud 1996, p. 50).

evidence at all of a “Greek” cult of Attis in the pre-Roman period.

The reference to Attis in the epigram by Dioscorides, even though rewritten according to a classic Greek model, shows the traces of the process of ideological and political reorganisation of the temple at Pessinous which led to the transformation of Atys the king into Atys the priest.

As for the theory that has been almost universally accepted, according to which the Greeks are not speaking about the castration of Attis because it would offend their sensibilities, the risk is that in this case one of “our” ideological parameters is being applied to a situation that perhaps we are unable to understand. From the 3rd cent. BCE, the Greeks show that they are perfectly aware of the existence of the practice of eunuchism among Phrygian devotees of the Great Mother, as is clear from various allusions in the epigrams⁶⁶. On the other hand, in the panorama of Greek myth, there are indications of “abnormal” sexualities either by excess or by deficit, or more generally, of abnormal aspects: in fact these occur as distinctive features of “heroic” characters⁶⁷. Why then, even though they knew of it, would the Greeks have concealed the castration of Attis before the 3rd cent. BCE? In my opinion, because before that date it did not exist on the mythical level whereas – as we shall see below – it is probable that the cult of the Great Mother in Anatolia was already associated with “effeminate” priests. And the Greeks show that they knew this aspect and applied it to the Galli, as is clear from the epigrams.

In short, even if a link between the Great Mother and Attis was known in Greece, in the present state of our knowledge we are absolutely not in a position to establish the mythical context in which that relationship took place. Furthermore, even if the existence of a cult of Attis is postulated, it has to be placed within the confines of the private associations of Piraeus⁶⁸. Unlike the cult of the Great Mother in Greece, as a whole, both in its “political” aspects and in its orgiastic nature, it does not refer to Attis but prefers a connection with other

⁶⁶ Dioscorides hints at it in the expression ἀγνὸς Ἄτις (*Anth. Pal.* VI 220 = Gow – Page a, Dioscorides 16, pp. 85-86), Erucius is more explicit and talks about the Gallus as a νεῖτομος (*Anth. Pal.* VI 234 = Gow – Page b, Erucius 10, p. 250).

⁶⁷ On the “lack of moderation” typical of the heroes cf. Brelich 1958 and especially pp. 225-312.

⁶⁸ Roller thinks that since its beginnings, the community in Piraeus devoted to the cult of the Great Mother consisted of both foreigners and citizens (Roller 1999, pp. 218-221).

mythical figures (Cabiri, Nymphs, etc.). It is probable that the very typical anti-fertility and anti-agrarian connotation that Attis assumes in the “Phrygian” version⁶⁹ – whereas in Greece the Great Mother is assimilated to the great chthonian goddesses and patronesses of vegetation cycles such as Demeter and Rhea – prevents him “officially” standing alongside her. In any case, the royal prerogatives characteristic of Attis in Phrygia make him completely unsuitable to accompany the goddess set to guard the βουλευτήριον, one of the very symbols of Athenian democracy. Hence the Greek re-interpretation of the foundation myth of the cult of Attis in Pessinous (Diodorus Siculus) in connection with the introduction of the cult of the Mother of the gods into Athens. Here Attis is replaced by a more anonymous μητρογύρτης or γάλλος: it is not a king, therefore, but an anonymous priest who founds a tomb cult closely linked with the cult of the Great Mother. Thus the ancient myth takes on a new function in a new political dimension, in which there were no longer any kings. The relationship between the Great Mother and the political institution remains. However, the situation is completely different from the one described in the myth as recorded by Diodorus.

On the other hand, the presence of Attis in Piraeus and his absence from the βουλευτήριον can be understood in the light of the duplication of the cult of the Great Mother that took place in Athens: it was addressed to an ancestral and national deity in the βουλευτήριον and to her foreign equivalent in Piraeus⁷⁰.

3.2. *Attis in Rome*

The documentation concerning the arrival of Attis at Rome is often contradictory in character, as was the case of his arrival in Greece. On one hand, in fact, the sources concerning the introduction of the Great Mother’s cult are silent about this figure. On the other, there is archaeological evidence which proves his presence in Rome from as early as the 2nd century BCE. As a result, scholars used different interpretative strategies, and there are two main approaches to the problem. Some scholars believe that in the republican era Attis had not

⁶⁹ Cf. *infra*.

⁷⁰ Concerning the duplication of the figure and the cult of the Great Mother in Athens see Borgeaud 1996, pp. 31-55.

yet attained the rank of a real god, but was considered an unspecified consort of the Great Mother; other scholars, on the contrary, are persuaded of his original divine status. At all events, no-one doubts the existence – since the imperial period – of a public ritual cycle related to Attis, which had its own development and culminated in representing him as a *deus omnipotens*.

In this paragraph I examine briefly the main stages of this development, both as regards the phases of this feast and scholarly discussion. My purpose here is to focus on the salient facets of Attis within the elaborative process which took place inside Roman culture.

As for the arrival of the Great Mother in Rome, historical information and mythical reworking of that information are intermingled in the literary sources.

According to the account by Livy⁷¹, the goddess Cybele reached Rome in 204 BCE, invoked by the Senate following a highly critical situation, the threat of the Carthaginians. In fact, from the *Sibylline Oracles* we learn that this threat was averted through the translation of the *Mater Idaea* from Pessinous to Rome. A delegation of aristocrats was sent to Pergamon so that King Attalus could act as mediator between Rome and the priesthood of Pessinous⁷². The image of the goddess, a stone, reached the mouth of the Tiber and from there it was carried on the arms of the matrons of the city, where it was lodged on the Palatine Hill in the temple of Victory until 191 BCE, the year her sanctuary was consecrated⁷³. Ovid⁷⁴ inserts into his account

⁷¹ Liv. XXIX 10, 4 – 11, 8 and XXIX 14, 5-14; cf. also Ov., *Fast.* IV vv. 247-348, with some differences if compared with Livy.

⁷² On the reasons for the mediation of the kingdom of Pergamon in this event cf. Borgeaud 1996, pp. 108-116.

⁷³ On the arrival of the Great Mother in Rome and its political consequences see Köves 1963; Bömer 1964; Così 1980-1981; Bremmer 1987; Gruen 1990, pp. 5-33; Burton 1996. In some recent studies it has been proposed that the Mother of the gods had not previously been completely unknown to the Romans (Calderone 1987-1988; Sfameni Gasparro 1996). According to them, they had occasion to know and worship her, not in far off Oriental lands and not even along the shores of Greece, but in Sicily. Differently Polacco 1987-1988 who, concerning Cybele's cult in Sicily, talks about "tracce assai labili e circoscritte, quasi tutte di età ellenistica e soprattutto romana" (p. 177). According to his date of the 2nd century CE, (pp. 177-180), even if one would ascribe the sanctuary in *Akrai* to the cult of the Great Mother, this sacred place could not have played any role, for obvious chronological reasons, in the introduction of cult of the Great Mother to Rome (according to Sfameni Gasparro 1996, the sanctuary should be dated to the 3rd century BCE). Also, in this case, the probable presence of Attis (relief II, fig. 5 in Sfameni Gasparro 1996, p. 71) in one of the reliefs would not be surprising.

⁷⁴ Ov., *Fast.* IV vv. 305-348; cf. also Prop., IV 11, 51-52.

the episode of Claudia Quinta, a matron whose virtue was a matter of gossip. She succeeded in saving the ship, which was carrying the image of the goddess, that had run aground in the river. Thanks to this "ordeal", she proved her innocence. Later on, other sources present Claudia Quinta as a Vestal virgin accused of not having maintained her chastity⁷⁵.

The Great Mother seems to have completed the long journey without her Phrygian companion, of whom there is no trace in the account. From the fact that Attis is not mentioned in the primary sources of the Roman cult of the Great Mother, Lambrechts deduced that he "a joué un rôle très effacé", both in the republican era and at the start of the imperial period⁷⁶. According to him, in particular, Attis was not considered a god in Rome before the end of the 2nd cent. CE, the year of the reform of the cult of the Great Mother by Antoninus Pius⁷⁷.

Later, this thesis was shown to be incorrect. During the excavation of the temple of Cybele on the Palatine Hill, P. Romanelli⁷⁸ brought to light a considerable number of statuettes of Attis. It was a sensational find which, according to Vermaseren, provided the proof of a cult of Attis from at least 191 BCE, the date the temple was inaugurated⁷⁹.

Lambrechts, however, has vigorously denied that thesis on the basis of various considerations. According to him, the statuettes of Attis were accompanied by female figures, caricature statuettes, masks and pines that could hardly be considered divine images. If they were held to be divine figurines, then it was not clear why there

⁷⁵ Sil. Ital., XVII 33-47; Stat., *Silv.* I 2, 45; Herod., *Hist.* I 11.

⁷⁶ Lambrechts 1952, p. 149, but cf. previously Showerman 1900.

⁷⁷ Lambrechts writes: "Certes, la personne d'Attis était connue à Rome, même avant l'époque claudienne, comme en font foi le carmen 63 de Catulle et deux passages d'Ovide. Mais nulle part il ne fait figure de dieu. L'Attis dont il est question dans la poésie de Catulle est un jeune Grec qui, par l'éviration, s'est mis au service de la déesse phrygienne; il n'est fait aucune mention du mythe d'Attis. Ce dernier est resté très longtemps un personnage bien falot et qui, en somme, n'existe qu'en fonction de Cybèle: d'où les expressions comme *Cybeleius Attis* ou *Berecynthius Attis*", Lambrechts 1952, pp. 149-150. Cf. also Lambrechts 1952a and 1967; *contra*, see Bastet 1965.

⁷⁸ Romanelli 1963; see also Romanelli 1964. These finds are dated by Pensabene to the period between the inauguration of the temple (191 BCE) and when it was rebuilt after a fire (111 BCE) (Pensabene 1982). Another deposit of terracottas was discovered by G. Boni in the area of the sanctuary (cf. Bartoli 1943, p. 231 and fig. 10; Vermaseren 1979-1988, III, pp. 10-11).

⁷⁹ Vermaseren 1977 pp. 43, 56, p. 119 n. 713.

were almost no images of Cybele. The statuettes, then, could be *ex-votos* from mothers who placed their own sons under the protection of Cybele. Lastly, there are no images of Attis among the archaeological finds that involve the arrival of the Great Mother at Ostia⁸⁰.

In view of the significance of these discoveries for the understanding of the role of Attis in Rome, it is necessary to consider the evidence in more detail.

Beside the figurines identified as Attis many other terracottas were found, the interpretation of which is not easy. In particular, Roller has connected the presence of phalluses⁸¹ and breasts⁸² with sexuality and nutrition, whereas the baskets of fruit⁸³ and the embracing figurines⁸⁴ refer to reproduction and fertility⁸⁵. She concludes that “in the early cult of the Magna Mater in Rome, Attis and the overtones of the sexuality that went with him were attractive features, to be encouraged through offerings and gifts”⁸⁶. However, on closer inspection, this evaluation seems to go against all the documentation on Attis that, as we shall see below, does not allow his involvement either in the sphere of fertility in general or in human fertility in particular. The connections with vegetation and sex must be considered as elements of a code to be deciphered and not as the ultimate explanation of the mythical and ritual complex involving Attis.

Even if it is not possible to reconstruct the type of cult or in any case the context in which these figurines were used, they seem to be connected in a fairly explicit way with the “Phrygian” tradition⁸⁷. It is difficult not to think, in respect of the *glandes penis*, of castration, while

⁸⁰ This thesis is supported by Lambrechts in his work published in 1967, the basic points of which are reported by Thomas 1984, p. 1506 n. 21. Thomas shares Lambrecht’s thesis and maintains that “Attis was virtually unknown in the Rome of republican times” (p.1506).

⁸¹ Cf. Vermaseren 1977-1989, III, nos. 68-73 and 76-77.

⁸² Some figurines with uncovered breasts were discovered, cf. Vermaseren 1977-1989, III, nos. 30-31; 33; 44; 46-48; 66-67 and a fragment of a statuette with multiple breasts, *id.*, n. 89.

⁸³ Cf. Vermaseren 1979-1988, III, nos. 182-183.

⁸⁴ *Id.*, nos. 129 and 152.

⁸⁵ Roller 1999, pp. 277-278.

⁸⁶ *Ead.*, p. 280.

⁸⁷ I am aware, at this point of my research, that the use of the terms “Lydian” and “Phrygian” in relation to the mythical and ritual traditions on Attis is increasingly incorrect and reductive. Nevertheless, I think that it is still possible to use them exclusively for reasons of convenience, in order to distinguish – as already explained in the first chapter – the mythical tale focusing on Attis’ emasculation from the other one where he is killed by a boar.

the presence of breasts is more difficult to explain. One immediately thinks of the episode, recorded by Arnobius⁸⁸, of the daughter of Gallus mutilating herself when, in front of the lad's corpse, she tears off her breasts. Certainly, it is the only possible link with these finds and without other supporting evidence, it is risky to deduce the existence of the practice of the removal of breasts in the Attis cult of which a trace has been left in myth⁸⁹, even if this trace cannot be easily ignored. More interesting, perhaps, is the parallel with the gesture of the mother who uncovers her breast in front of her son's corpse that would set the exhibition of breasts in a funerary context⁹⁰. The cypress cones⁹¹ and the pomegranate⁹² could also indicate the same context.

There are only two baskets with fruit which, according to Roller⁹³, could refer to fertility; and lastly, only one of the two figurines representing couples embracing has been identified as an image of winged Eros and Psyche⁹⁴, whereas the second, that Romanelli considered to be two figures embracing, Vermaseren sees as representing male genitals⁹⁵. It can also be noted that, together with these finds a considerable number of images of animals and of male and female persons was also discovered. The excessive number of Attis figurines, as Lambrechts had already noted, is in contrast with the very few images of Cybele, which possibly reflects the role that has to be assigned to those figurines. Analysis of the finds seems to make Roller's interpretation very hypothetical, which in any case contradicts the very characteristics of Attis that have emerged so far. Even if we were to consider the various figures as gifts, the meaning of the actual offerings would in any case remain obscure: they could be either ex-votos or substitute figurines.

⁸⁸ Arn., *Adv. nat.* V 7.

⁸⁹ Cf. Hepding 1903, p. 164 n. 3.

⁹⁰ This does not clash with the idea of the breast as source of nourishment: "(...) il gesto in apparenza lascivo può risolversi in altro, e mediare un *ethos* elevato, come nel caso di una madre che esibisce i seni al figlio morto, seni che qui assurgono a simbolo del latte dato e perduto e al tempo stesso a scongiurante invito al ritorno" (De Martino 1975, p. 225).

⁹¹ Cf. Vermaseren 1977-1989, III, nos. 74-75.

⁹² Cf. *Id.*, nos. 31; 63; 67; 126.

⁹³ Roller 1996, pp. 276.

⁹⁴ Cf. Vermaseren 1977-1989, III, n. 129.

⁹⁵ Even if, as one can infer from the question mark preceding the interpretation, this reading of the evidence is also far from being certain, cf. Vermaseren 1977-1989, III, n. 152.

It is interesting to compare the many statuettes of children (boys and girls) found both in classical and ancient Near Eastern sanctuaries, and related to healing cults connected with children⁹⁶. Also, in the excavation on the Palatine Hill, gods and mythical figures connected with healing cults were found, as e.g. Telesphoros, Dionysus and/or his retinue, statuettes of children offering fruits or birds, statuettes of girls of the Tanagraean type and also toys⁹⁷. All these are well attested in this type of cults. If such is the case, then, the statuettes representing Attis may symbolise the little boys placed by their parents into the loving care of the Great Mother⁹⁸.

Ultimately, what seems to emerge from the finds as a whole is a cultic context that, although different from the public rites promoted by the Senate, co-existed with them. In any case, even if the probable private nature of the cult of Attis in this period should be emphasised, it should not be forgotten that it was always carried out in the civic temple, on the Palatine Hill, that is in the very “heart” of Rome. This indicates that there should not be too much stress on his “extraneous nature” and on the fact that his absence from public epigraphic and literary documents and from public iconography may be due to the deliberate intent to exclude him from official aspects of the Metroac cult. Perhaps the *transfer* of the Great Mother to Rome automatically implied the “adoption” of Attis, but in a subordinate role, without the sources in question considering it necessary to mention him. What is true is that his re-interpretation in Rome makes him something *different* with respect to the original Anatolian traditions.

As for the documentation on the presence of Attis in Rome at an earlier period, the *hypogaeum* found near Porta Maggiore, dating to 20 CE or the period of Claudius⁹⁹, is difficult to interpret. On the central fresco a winged Attis is depicted, carrying Ganymedes towards the sky, and around him there are four panels on which Attis is painted with the *pedum* in a sad pose: the ideology that underlies this portrayal is not clear¹⁰⁰.

Even though the earliest “official” sources are silent about Attis, he

⁹⁶ Cf. Vorster 1981.

⁹⁷ Cf. Pensabene 1982, p. 87.

⁹⁸ The distinctive healing power of the Great Mother with regard to children is also evident in the account of the myth as recorded by Diodorus Siculus (III 58).

⁹⁹ Bastet 1958 (quoted in Vermaseren 1979-1988, III, p. 97) and Carcopino 1926, respectively.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Vermaseren 1966, pp. 54-55 and 1977, pp. 55-57.

is well attested during the imperial age, a period he seems to be at the very heart of a public cyclical festival that took place in the second half of March, known as the “holy week”. The celebration in Rome of this “holy week” commemorating the events of Attis was of a funerary nature and was connected by the ancients to Phrygian ceremonies.

The calendar of these ceremonies, which we know from a late source (354 CE), is as follows¹⁰¹:

Id. Mart.	<i>Canna intrat</i>
XI K. Apr.	<i>Arbor intrat</i>
IX K. Apr.	<i>Sanguem</i>
VIII K. Apr.	<i>Hilaria</i>
VII K. Apr.	<i>Requ< i>etio</i>
VI K. Apr.	<i>Lavatio</i>
V K. Apr.	<i>Initium Caiani</i>

The day of the *Canna intrat* marked the beginning of the ceremonies. The college of the *cannophori* – evidence for which at Ostia oscillates between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd centuries¹⁰² – was connected specifically with this feast day in which, probably, were remembered the birth, the exposure and finally the rescue of little Attis on the banks of the river Sangarius¹⁰³.

The college of the *dendrophori* was a much older institution and linked to the fulcrum of the Attis rituals. It dealt with the ceremonies for the introduction of the pine tree, presumably the figure of the dead Attis, into the temple of Cybele (*Arbor intrat*). Most of the inscriptions about the college of the *dendrophori* come from Ostia¹⁰⁴, and also from the Hilarian basilica¹⁰⁵. According to Joannes Lydus¹⁰⁶, the institution of these ceremonies is ascribed to the period of Claudius, the time of the first reform of the Metroac cult. The day of the *Arbor intrat* was a day of lamentation for Attis who had disappeared. On the *Dies*

¹⁰¹ Philoc. *Fasti anno 354 p. C. conscripti*, CIL I², cf. Th. Mommsen's remarks, *id.*, pp. 312-314.

¹⁰² Cf. Vermaseren 1977-1989, III, nos. 398, 399, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 416, 417.

¹⁰³ Jul., *V Or.* 165b, and Sall., *De diis et mundo* IV. Two representations of Attis in connection with reeds are quoted by Graillet 1912, p. 117 n. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Vermaseren 1977-1989, III, nos. 364, 386, 400, 405, 408, 409, 412, 414.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*, nos. 208, 212.

¹⁰⁶ Jo. Lydus, *De mens.* IV 59.

sanguinis, instead, there took place the bloody rite of self-emasculation by the Galli who on that day gorily flogged themselves. It is followed by the *Hilaria*, a later insertion. The ritual pivoted on the alternation of sadness and rejoicing: just as there is weeping for the sad fate of the Phrygian youth (and the first to weep is the Great Mother/Agdistis), so there is joy for his special position in the world of the dead (and the first to rejoice is Agdistis for this gift from Zeus/Jupiter). The following days are dedicated to the gradual return to normality: after a rest, the statue of the Great Mother will be immersed in the purifying bath of the Almus to be ready to face the *Megalsia* alone¹⁰⁷.

The studies by Lambrechts and Fishwick have made it possible to reconstruct the festival cycle connected with Attis, as well as its transformations over time.

According to Lambrechts, the festival cycle began to evolve from the time of Claudius, with the adoption in the official ceremonies of certain features authentically “Phrygian”, such as the conveyance of a cut pine tree to the temple of Cybele on the Palatine Hill, to which would correspond the official institution of the college of *dendrophori*, those in fact entrusted with carrying the tree. The following day was for libations of blood and self-emasculation. After the day of lamentation, the effigy of Cybele would be purified by being washed in the river Almo. To Antoninus Pius, instead, is due the institution of the *taurobolium pro salute Imperatoris* and the high priestly office of the Archigallus¹⁰⁸. From the second half of the 2nd century, then, the idea of an annual “rebirth” of Attis would become increasingly strong, as institutionalised in the *Hilaria*¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁷ A survey of the principal phases of the March ritual in Rome, with references to the different associations involved, is given in Thomas 1984.

¹⁰⁸ Differently, Carcopino 1942, p. 106ff., ascribes the introduction of the Archigallate to Claudius. Momigliano 1932 maintains that the *Archigallus* already existed in previous times, even if it is only under Claudius that he became the superintendent of the temple – or temples – in the imperial cities. Cf. Lambrechts – Bogaert 1969 for the reconciliation of the data: “Bien que l’archigallat en tant que prêtrise suprême du culte métrouque dans l’Empire soit une institution d’Antonin le Pieux, le terme existait auparavant (...). Il est donc possible que le titre d’archigalle ait été créé à Pessinonte sous Claude, non pour désigner l’archiprêtre de Cybèle et d’Attis, mais pour indiquer le chef de ce corps des galls qui existait toujours et qui continuait à jouer un rôle important dans le culte” (p. 410). Concerning the institution of the *taurobolium*, the discovery of a new inscription in Beneventum puts the date when the ritual was made official back to a period between Flavians and Trajan (cf. Adamo Muscettola 1994).

¹⁰⁹ Lambrechts 1952. Furthermore, he denies the presence of the *lavatio* before the Claudian reform.

Fishwick's studies¹¹⁰ on the colleges of the *Cannophori* and the *Hastiferi* have resulted in a distribution of the ceremonies over a period from Claudius to beyond the reign of Antoninus Pius¹¹¹, as in the following table¹¹²:

	Claudius	Antoninus Pius	Antoninus Pius (or later)
15th March		<i>Canna intrat</i> (<i>cannophori</i>)	
22nd March	<i>Arbor intrat</i> (<i>dendrophori</i>)		
24th March	<i>Sanguem</i> (<i>galli</i>)		
25th March			<i>Hilaria</i>
26th March			<i>Requies</i>
27th March	<i>Lavatio</i> (? <i>hastiferi</i>)		

Thus, over a stretch of time from 41 to 161 CE the set of ceremonies linked with the cult of Attis, that was to spread from Rome to the various provinces of the empire, became an institution.

To summarise: these ceremonies, presumably performed privately in an earlier period, were institutionalised and made public by Claudius. The subsequent intervention, of Antoninus Pius, it would seem, established the day of the *Canna intrat*. Additional developments of the liturgy were the institution of the rite of *taurobolium* and the office of the Archigallus¹¹³. In this way Roman citizens, who were strictly prohibited from self-emasculation, were able to take on an important function within the Metroac religious institute and at the same time emphasis was given to the importance that institute had for the well-being of the Emperor and the state¹¹⁴. The insertion of the *Hilaria* in the ritual procedures completed the "holy week".

¹¹⁰ Fishwick 1966 and 1967.

¹¹¹ On the colleges and associations connected with the cult of the Great Mother and Attis in Rome see the summary by Thomas 1984 (with previous bibliography).

¹¹² Fishwick 1967, p. 202 (quoted also by Vermaseren 1977, p. 122).

¹¹³ Concerning these two features of the cult of Attis cf. *infra*.

¹¹⁴ The *taurobolium* was performed by the Archigallus under divine command and very often its purpose was to guarantee the emperor's health.

Further important archaeological evidence for the cult of Attis and particularly for the festival cycle is provided from the *Campus Matris Magnae* at Ostia, where there is an *Attideum* that may be dated to the period of Antoninus¹¹⁵. Even making allowance for the features peculiar to Ostia, its marginal position in relation to Rome and the features of the cult of Attis practised there¹¹⁶, this sacred complex proves that Attis had an increasingly important role within the cult reserved for the Great Mother. This role coincides with the fact that the public nature of the rites intended for him became increasingly evident and more widespread¹¹⁷.

3.3. *Attis and the “vegetal connection”*

In this rapid survey of the “strong” moments of the ritual in March there have been several references to the “Phrygian” version of the myth as given in Arnobius: the Mother of the gods is the one who first inaugurates the funeral proceedings with a series of actions and gestures that then are carried out precisely in the ritual¹¹⁸. It is chiefly through this version that it is possible to make, at least in part, the connections between the mythical event and the public ritual. There is a precise correspondence between the operations performed during these ceremonies and those carried out by the Mother of the gods and by Ia on the dead body of Attis, according to the account by Arnobius¹¹⁹. After his death, the Mother of the gods collects his *vires* and buries them, after wrapping them in the cloths of the dead. The tree-trunk under which the drama takes place is decorated with the violets born from Attis’ blood and at this point (as Arnobius himself remarks), in the ritual the same is done to the sacred pine tree. The bride of Attis, Ia, covers the young man’s chest with soft wool. She joins in the cry uttered by Agdistis, and finally she kills herself and thus gives rise to the red violets born from her blood. The Mother of the gods also sheds tears from which an

¹¹⁵ Calza 1946-1947.

¹¹⁶ Cf. ch. 3.7.

¹¹⁷ On some iconographic evidence concerning the cult of Attis at Ostia cf. the “iconological” study of Beard 1998, whose remarks seem to me somewhat hypothetical.

¹¹⁸ Arn., *Adv. nat.* V 7. The mourning of the Mother of the gods is also mentioned in *Schol. ad Nic., Alexiph.* v. 8, Geymonat a, p. 60. Concerning the ritual gestures in ancient mourning and its religio-historical and anthropological significance, De Martino 1975 (pp. 195-235) is still fundamental.

¹¹⁹ Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 7.

almond tree appears, a symbol of death's bitterness. The pine tree under which Attis killed himself is brought by the Mother of the gods into her cave. Around the tree, Agdistis and the Great Mother lament and strike their chest. Agdistis asks Jupiter to allow Attis to come back to life, but the god only permits his body not to decompose, his hair continues to grow and his little finger to move. In gratitude, Agdistis consecrates the corpse at Pessinous and pays honour to it by annual ceremonies and priestly services.

Arnobius systematically sets out links between the actions described in the account of the myth and each element of the cult in the way it was organised in the 4th century CE in Rome and in the rest of the Empire. He explicitly connects the ritual pine tree with the tree that the Great Mother brought into her cave. He also connects the wool stripes with which it is decorated with the bands put down on Attis' body. And he connects the violets garlands hung up on the pine tree with those used in the myth by the goddess to encircle the trunk of the same tree. Moreover, the Galli who strike their chest and mourn, recall the actions performed by the Mother of the gods and Agdistis. Also, their fast is modelled on the Great Mother's abstention from cereals during the mourning period¹²⁰.

Only part of the sources from which Arnobius derived his account goes back to the pre-Roman period. Arnobius explicitly quotes a person called Timotheus¹²¹. Later on, he cites a *pontifex* Valerius who, apart from his identity, certainly belonged to the Roman milieu¹²². Accordingly, even if the possibility can not be completely excluded that Valerius obtained his information from a pre-Roman source, it is very probable that the tradition received by Arnobius is Phrygian in origin, even though he transmits it as recast within the new culture that accepted it, i.e. Roman culture.

In the account by Arnobius, there is an evident care for the vegetal

¹²⁰ Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 16.

¹²¹ Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 5. In any case, with our present knowledge, the identification of the Timotheus quoted by Arnobius with the ancient theologian who lived in the 3rd century BCE is conjectural (cf. Lane 1996a, p. 128 and n. 21; Roller 1999, p. 244 and n. 20).

¹²² Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 7. In fact, there is no agreement among the scholars about the identity of this Valerius pontifex. According to Turcan, he is the augur M. Valerius Messala (Turcan 1996a, p. 389); Mora suggests, besides Messala, also L. Valerius Flaccus, pontifex from 196 to 180 BCE (Mora 1994, p. 125 n. 64). Also Borgeaud defines the terms of the problem (Borgeaud 1996, p. 72 and n. 78), but does not express an opinion.

world that is completely absent from the version given in Pausanias¹²³, while yet other allusions are found in Ovid¹²⁴, particularly when he records the transformation of Attis into a pine tree. This suggests that the reference to vegetation in the dossier on Attis originated and developed specifically in Roman culture and in connection with the cult practised in Rome.

The problem of the significance to ascribe to the “vegetal” connotations of Attis, and particularly the singling out of the different places and times of their consolidating is a fundamental topic in the study of this figure and the related tradition. Starting with J.G. Frazer, in fact, Attis has been interpreted as a vegetation *numen*, that is a figure marked since its origin as a character connected with the natural cycle¹²⁵. Even though Frazer’s theories are now outdated, some scholars still accept (*mutatis mutandis*) the connection of Attis with vegetation as the key to interpreting this whole tradition. They believe that, after his death, Attis, like other figures (Adonis, Osiris, etc.), would return to the world of the dead as required by a rite connected with seasonal fertility that, precisely through his return, would be reactivated¹²⁶. The alleged connection of Attis with the natural cycle, together with his painful “sufferings”, would represent his authentic “Phrygian” aspect. This interpretation in its general form was firstly proposed by U. Bianchi¹²⁷ and later developed by G. Sfameni Gasparro in an analytical study of Attis and Cybele. I shall introduce here briefly the data on the basis of which Sfameni Gasparro developed her interpretative hypothesis.

From the evidence prior to the documentation in Latin two passages are adduced to prove the “fertility” hypothesis. One is from Diodorus Siculus¹²⁸ about the barrenness of animals and vegetation after the death of Attis followed by the institution of the yearly ceremonies that would guarantee “in a stable and definite manner the regular rhythm of the seasonal cycle”¹²⁹. The other is about the birth of the almond tree from the earth that had been fertilised by Agdistis in the account by Pausanias¹³⁰.

¹²³ Paus., VII 17, 10-12.

¹²⁴ Ov., *Metamorph.* X 103-105.

¹²⁵ On J.G. Frazer and the theories about the *dying god* cf. ch. 4.4.

¹²⁶ On this interpretation cf. *infra*.

¹²⁷ Cf. e.g. Bianchi 1965.

¹²⁸ Diod Sic. III 59.

¹²⁹ Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 45.

¹³⁰ Paus., VII 17, 10.

As is clear from my previous analysis of the account as recorded by Diodorus Siculus¹³¹, both the theme of sterility/famine and the theme of the annual cult on the tomb of Attis go back to the cult of a hero/king. Furthermore, the theme of sterility/famine cannot be used there as evidence for a link between Attis and vegetation because in this case the calamity is not caused by a fertility god¹³², but is connected with violent death and with the spilling of innocent blood, widespread motifs in ancient Mediterranean traditions. As for the version in Pausanias, as there are no other references in it to the vegetal world, the emergence of the almond tree from the earth must instead be connected with the theme of the “miraculous” birth of Attis¹³³. The other references are to the interpretations of Eusebius¹³⁴ and Firmicus Maternus¹³⁵, apart from the passages in Ovid and Arnobius¹³⁶. Eusebius and Firmicus Maternus are discussed in the following chapters. Here it is sufficient to remark that the allegorical interpretation by Eusebius of Attis as a flower that will be cut off before giving fruit does not refer to vegetal fertility as such but, instead, gives prominence to the sterility of Attis. As for Firmicus Maternus, who draws a parallel between Attis and the reaped ears, this metaphor is to be inserted within the framework of the general testimony supplied by Firmicus. This testimony is strongly influenced both by the author’s personal reinterpretation and philosophical speculations of his time in which the divine characters are understood in “physical” terms. Sfameni Gasparro herself remarks that “(...) the chthonic and vegetal connections of the character appear evident from the documents examined, even if (...) they concern arborescent and florescent vegetation and not crops”¹³⁷.

In any case it does not seem consistent to collect individual elements extrapolated from the various traditions, and then place them next to each other and interpret them in a *continuum*. Such a procedure may give the impression that some aspects play a more significant role than they have within each particular version. Rather than

¹³¹ Cf. pp. 42-47.

¹³² As is the case, among others, of Eleusinian myth.

¹³³ Because in this way Attis is deprived of his father, and this is an essential element for the foundation of the Pessinous theocracy.

¹³⁴ Eus., *PE* III 11; 12; 15; 17.

¹³⁵ Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. rel.* III.

¹³⁶ Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 43-49.

¹³⁷ *Ead.*, p. 48.

being an ancient and distinctive characteristic of Attis, his “vegetal” aspects seem instead to appear in a particular phase of his “history”, more specifically, at the very moment it enters the Roman world.

In particular, the version of Arnobius seems to reflect in the account of the myth the importance given *in the ritual* to some “vegetal” aspects of Attis. But these features do not seem to have that “founding” character that has been deliberately appealed to for evidence of a deep connection between Attis and the sphere of vegetal fertility/secundity.

The problem then must be posed of defining the significance these elements have in the account by Arnobius.

The article by A. Brelich on the food regulations for the cult of the Great Mother in Rome sets us on the right path¹³⁸. The ban on eating bread¹³⁹ matched by the permission to eat vegetables and fruit and the offering of *moretum* to the goddess are evidence for a contrast between the Great Mother and Ceres. In turn, this contrast shapes the opposition between a “before”, represented by primitive horticulture, and a “now”, based on cereal growing¹⁴⁰. But according to Brelich, this “before” is not criticised: “Se nei culti greci si è potuto notare come l’interdizione del pane rappresentasse solo un momento rituale in funzione dialettica nei riguardi di una solennizzazione del successivo consumo rituale del pane, nel culto romano della Magna Mater la stessa interdizione – con correlativa offerta alimentare in base a ortaggi – rappresenta stabilmente, e consacra, la forma d’esistenza anteriore alla cerealicoltura”¹⁴¹. This “anteriority” of the Magna Mater has a counterpart in the Roman calendar, where her feast comes before that of Ceres. And as for the historical origin of that contrast, Brelich stresses that it did not apply in Greece. In Phrygia, instead, it is significant that the goddess does not seem to have an agrarian character. So the contrast in question must therefore be a typical Roman feature¹⁴². The vegetal elements in the version of Arnobius, which I have already used to prove its probable “Roman” origin, take on a meaning of their own when read as part of this inter-

¹³⁸ Brelich 1965.

¹³⁹ Sources in Grailot 1912, p. 120 n. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Also the prohibition to drink wine before entering the sanctuary, as attested in the Arnobius tale, can be interpreted according to this reading.

¹⁴¹ Brelich 1965, p. 40.

¹⁴² Therefore, the Galli falling asleep *sine Cerere* in Catullus’ c. 63 (v. 36) does not represent, as Takács 1996, p. 380, suggests, a phase in which the Galli do not yet belong to the Mother of the gods/Ceres, but it expresses the dialectical opposition between these two goddesses.

pretation of the Great Mother in terms of “before” and “after” with respect to the current situation. The vegetation that appears in the myth has certainly not been “domesticated” by agriculture¹⁴³, but instead can be defined as “preagricola, paragricola e precereale”¹⁴⁴, and provides the basis for the “otherness” in respect of the current reality that other myths express in a different way¹⁴⁵. This does not imply that in Phrygia the myth in question expressed the same meanings. It is a revision with a different ideological function of a mythical account that, exported to a different cultural context from where it emerged, is used by that context to establish a different reality.

The vegetal aspects of Attis as a sign of a relationship with the sphere of fertility/fecundity only become prominent later and in “learned” circles, where his myth and his ritual are revised in the light of rationalising philosophical ideologies, “pagan” and Christian alike. But it is always an immature fertility and so once again, sterile¹⁴⁶. Throughout his history (at least in the “Phrygian” version of the myth) Attis is always portrayed in “anti-generative” terms (i.e., as opposed to generation).

On the other hand, the two clearest vegetal references in the version by Arnobius¹⁴⁷, the pine¹⁴⁸ and the birth of the violets, have an

¹⁴³ Also the bull sacrificed by the *cannophori* is offered for the fields “on the mountains” (Jo. Lydus, *De mens.* IV 49): it deals with “tame” places but far from the city and civilised space.

¹⁴⁴ Chirassi Colombo 1982, p. 324; cf. also Ribichini 1982, who stresses how this kind of plant is lacking in importance from the alimentary point of view in an agricultural society (but once it was not so) even if they continue to be of value in other spheres.

¹⁴⁵ On the connection between myth and eunuchism see *infra*.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. the hymn that can be dated to the time of Hadrian and quoted by the Gnostic Naassenes where Attis is called a “harvested green ear of grain” (Hipp., *Ref.* V 9, 8) or Porphyry, and subsequently Eusebius (Eus., *PE* III 11, 12; 15; 17) and Augustine (Aug., *De civ. dei* VII 25), who regards Attis as the image of the flower without fruit. An exception is represented by Firmicus Maternus, who connects Attis with the harvest grain, on which see *infra*.

¹⁴⁷ The birth of Attis from an almond (Pausanias) or a pomegranate fruit (Arnobius) refers, as already stated, to the theme of the “miraculous” birth used in several mythological tales about heroes. In this case, one has to add the requirement that Attis must be born without a father and without sexual intercourse.

¹⁴⁸ Roller connects the ritual of the pine tree with the passage from Ovid, *Fasti* IV 273-277, which tells how the ship carrying the Great Mother to Rome was built with the same sacred pine trees that Aeneas used to build the vessels to escape from Troy. The pine, according to Ovid, became the sacred symbol of the Great Mother, the protectress of Aeneas. The presence of pine-shaped terracottas in the Palatine temple should prove that already at this period the Metroac cult was connected with the origins of Rome (Roller 1999, p. 279). The episode of Attis’ death under a pine tree would therefore be “an artificial aetiology”. On the contrary, the presence of the pine tree in connection with Attis’ death gives further emphasis to the funereal character

exact equivalent in the Roman ritual that in both cases refers not to a *seasonal cycle* and not even to a more generic link with vegetation but instead to the funereal nature of the rite itself. The conifers – the pine, the laurel, the cypress – are typical funereal trees of ancient Rome¹⁴⁹ and the trunk of the plant, lamented and carried right into the temple of the Great Mother, most probably represents Attis himself as dead, and dead *for ever*¹⁵⁰. The blood of the Galli (who not by chance strike themselves with pine cones and pine branches)¹⁵¹ flowing down the trunk seems to correspond to those needs for “nourishment” that the anaemic dead aspire to¹⁵². On the tree are hung strips of wool that Ia had once used to cover the by then bloodless chest of Attis and lastly it is adorned with violets. In the myth these violets grow either from the blood of Attis or from Ia’s, but the use of red flowers as symbols of blood belongs to a very wide tradition¹⁵³. Violets are by tradition flowers that are connected with the dead, as documented for example by Ovid in the *Fasti*¹⁵⁴, in respect of offerings to the dead. The 22nd March, the day of the *Arbor intrat*, was also the *Dies violae* on which the flowers in question were thrown onto

of the story: this tree does not seem connected with death in a special way either in Phrygia or in Greece, but it is in the Roman world where the Arnobian version of the myth took shape. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the tree is of primary importance in the religious iconography of the ancient Near East and it is ascribed special meanings (for guidance, among the great number of studies, see Danthine 1937; James 1966; Yarden 1972; Cook 1978; Ribichini 1981, pp. 61ff.; Kepinski 1982; Parpola 1993; Brosse 1993, Kourou 2001). Among the many possible comparisons, cf., e.g., the *eya*-tree erected before Telipinu in Hittite milieu (Pecchioli Daddi – Polvani 1990, p. 84 and n. 25).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Cumont 1942, p. 219 and p. 506. Of special interest are the cutting down and the processional transport of a fir in the Rumanian obsequies of Lazzaro Boia, reported by De Martino 1975, pp. 182-192, where a kind of funeral song is also dedicated to the tree. Note, also, that the fir is decorated with wool (p. 188) and the women cry on seeing it (p. 183).

¹⁵⁰ The small image of Attis which was probably hung on the pine tree (Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. rel.* XXVII 1; the relief from Ostia [Vermaseren 1966, p. 35 and Pl. XXI, 1]) emphasises the close connection between the young Phrygian shepherd and the tree (cf. Graillot 1912, p. 123), rather than hinting at a “return” or a “resurrection” (cf. Vermaseren 1966, p. 35; Renard – Deroux 1983).

¹⁵¹ Sources in Graillot 1912, p. 127, n. 2.

¹⁵² Cumont 1949, p. 45.

¹⁵³ Cumont (1949, p. 45 and n. 1) quotes the Servius passage where it is stressed that red flowers *ad sanguinis imitationem, ubi sedes animae* (Serv., *ad Aen.* V 79) have to be given preference as funeral offerings to be laid near the grave.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Ovid., *Fast.* II vv. 537-540: *Tegula porrectis satis est uelata coronis / Et sparsae fruges parcaque mica salis / Inque mero mollita Ceres uiolae solutae: / Haec habeat media testa relicta uia.*

graves¹⁵⁵. In an inscription, the dead person commends his relatives to honour him *die natalis sui et rosationis et violae et parentalibus*¹⁵⁶.

In this way the ritual stresses, through an unmistakable funereal symbolism that is in turn reflected in the myth as recorded by Arnobius, the death of Attis and even more importantly, the recognition of his definitive presence in the other world through the yearly repetition of his funeral.

3.4. *Mythical emasculation: Agdistis, Attis and Gallus*

One of the most disquieting features of the cult of the Great Mother is the practice of a self-emasculation by special class of priests¹⁵⁷, the Galli. It was they who in the frenzy of the dances and to the incessant beat of ritual instruments sanctioned through this bloody practice a bond of eternal fidelity to the Great Mother¹⁵⁸. The ancient sources, Greek and Latin, “pagan” and Christian, regard these “priests” with a critical eye, emphasising how much this consecration rite was considered as foreign and dangerous by their religious sensibilities¹⁵⁹. On the other hand, self-emasculation is also an important element in the “Phrygian” version of the Attis myth. We must now consider the connections that were established between self-emasculation, Attis and the Galli.

Both in the version in Pausanias and in the one in Arnobius¹⁶⁰ the

¹⁵⁵ *CIL* VI 10234, cf. Cumont 1949, p. 45.

¹⁵⁶ *CIL* VI 10248 and also *CIL* VI 10239.

¹⁵⁷ I am aware that the term “priests” – which I use here only in its general meaning of “ritual agents” – is unsuitable for the Galli: it would perhaps be more exact to use the expression “cultic appointees”, cf. Giammarco Razzano 1984, pp. 229-230.

¹⁵⁸ There is no agreement among scholars about the origin and meaning of this practice. According to Frazer 1906, pp. 168-170, and Cook 1914, pp. 390-396, its aim was to promote the regeneration of the vegetal cycle; Farnell 1907, pp. 300-302, regarded it as a means to be assimilated to Cybele. According to Nock 1925, emasculation put the eunuchs on the same level as children and virgins, thus granting them a permanent condition of purity and, consequently, the correct performance of the ritual acts (the various interpretations are discussed by Södergard 1993). Further studies focus on the Galli from a sociological, psychological and psychoanalytical point of view, cf. Maass 1925; Nock 1925; Widengren 1963; Richard 1966; Sanders 1972 (with previous literature) and 1978; Giammarco Razzano 1984; Södergard 1993; Beard 1994; Michelini Tocci 1996; Lane 1996a; Pachis 1996; Roscoe 1996; Roller 1997; Grottanelli 1998 and other studies. On ethics and sexuality in cult of the Great Mother – particularly with reference to the Emperor Julian – cf. Così 1986.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Richard 1966; Sanders 1978.

¹⁶⁰ Paus. VII 17, 10-12 and Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 5-7. An analytical comparison between the two versions in Mora 1994, pp. 117-125.

first self-emasculation is the one performed on Agdistis, the hermaphrodite son of the “virtual” incest between Zeus and Cybele. Its androgyny is dangerous in that it is potentially the origin of an uncontrollable and disordered generative process and so has to be reduced in size. In both versions, its castration is performed at the gods’ decree. From its member (Pausanias) or its blood (Arnobius) a tree grows (an almond tree for Pausanias and a pomegranate tree for Arnobius). But the game of fatherless generations continues because Nana, the daughter of King Sangarius or of the river with the same name¹⁶¹, becomes pregnant by placing in her own lap the fruit of the tree. The son to whom she gives birth is Attis who, growing up, lives a life outside the social rules and receives the love of Agdistis alone (Pausanias) or of Agdistis and the Mother of the gods (Arnobius). This relationship is condemned by the king of Pessinous who decides to make Agdistis marry his own daughter. On the day of the wedding Agdistis infuses madness into the wedding guests with the result that Attis emasculates himself.

One of the most surprising features, in the Arnobius version, is the duplication of the goddess in the two characters of Agdistis and the Mother of the gods, a feature that allows the insertion of the supplementary excursus on the self-emasculation of Agdistis. Whatever the process may have been that led to the concept of Agdistis as androgynous¹⁶², it is a symbol of wild and uncontrolled nature, which is ended by the joint decree of all the gods. Moreover, Agdistis is only partly “normalised” by the self-emasculation inasmuch as, in the Arnobius version, it does not become a woman but “un castrat visiblement muni d’attributs féminins”¹⁶³.

There is no lack of psychoanalytical interpretations of the myth¹⁶⁴, that read the Agdistis-Attis relationship as a relationship between mother and son¹⁶⁵, or of structuralist interpretations¹⁶⁶,

¹⁶¹ On the Phrygian river cf. Tischler 1977, s.v. *Sangarius*.

¹⁶² Cf. Gusmani 1959, p. 209.

¹⁶³ Borgeaud 1996, pp. 85-86.

¹⁶⁴ Meslin 1978 and 1979.

¹⁶⁵ In this regard see the critical remarks of Mora, according to whom the parental relationship between Attis and Agdistis is rather one of father and son (Mora 1994, p. 122). In fact, the parental relationships between the different mythical characters are later complicated by the multiplication of the maternal figures. To be exact, Attis’ mother is neither Agdistis nor the Great Mother, but either the daughter of Sangarius (Pausanias) or Nana (Arnobius).

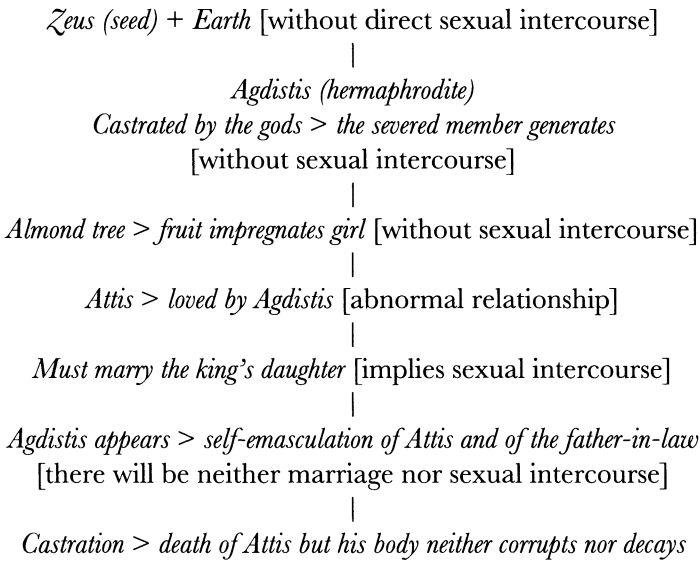
¹⁶⁶ Podeman Sørensen 1989a.

that see Attis as the mediator in a series of opposing terms (wild/civilised, male/female, life/non-life, vegetal world/animal and human world)¹⁶⁷.

The “Phrygian” version, as transmitted either by Pausanias or by Arnobius, was evidently particularly concerned with sexuality, a concern that, in my opinion, takes concrete form in the polar opposition between procreation and sterility.

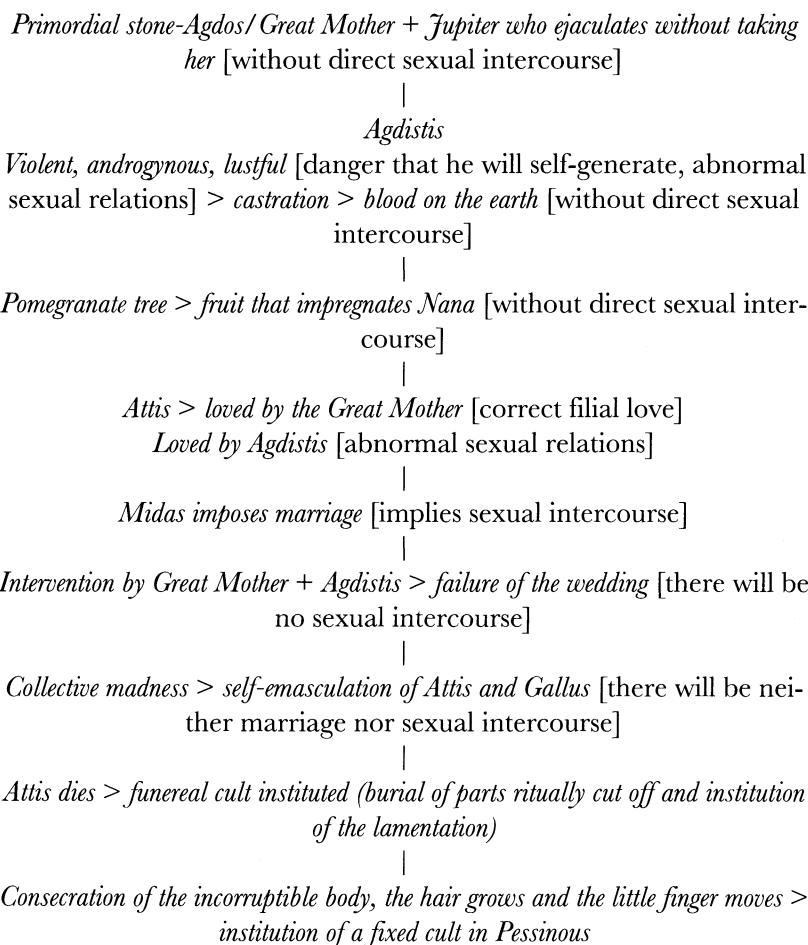
A schematic presentation of the two accounts may help to explain their structure:

Pausanias:



¹⁶⁷ Podeman Sørensen remarks (*id.*, p. 27): “This mediation, however, secures a connection between the human and the primeval or divine level. Attis is not only a mediator of the horizontal oppositions throughout the myth, but unity on the human level. When the dead Attis unites life and not-life, this may be seen as a return to the primeval level, where life issued from a stone. And when an end is put to sexual reproduction this may be seen as a return to that stage, where life comes from stone and where the male-female relation is not yet relevant to the creation of life”. The end of the myth cannot simply be considered as the re-establishment of the initial stage: according to this myth, the primordial events are chaotic and violent; the fecundation of the stone corresponds to an unsuccessful rape which generates a hermaphrodite being, Agdistis, who possesses an explosive and uncontrolled generative power: it deals with a situation which has to be overcome.

Arnobius:



Thus the myth in the “Phrygian” version clearly shows an interplay of relations and oppositions between sexuality (proper and improper), castration and death. Così has suggested equating the episode of Agdistis’ castration with that of Attis in that both would have “lo scopo primario e principale di regolare un’attività sessuale smodata, che oltrepassa la norma”¹⁶⁸. However, whereas in the case of Agdistis the opposition is between the hermaphrodite’s wild and dissolute behaviour and the aspiration of the gods for a peaceful regime

¹⁶⁸ Così 1986, p. 29.

("ordine tranquillo"), for Attis the opposition would be between civic order and the royal institutions and the wild extra-political world. According to Così, in the case of Agdistis, its castration would have a "therapeutic" purpose, whereas the castration of Attis is the episode that, at the level of myth, is the foundation for the cultic practice of the emasculated priests. Castration represents the moment of greatest tension in a dialectic between two antagonistic worlds. On the one hand, the civic world of ordered and institutionalised love; on the other, the agrestic world of unrestrained sex without rules. In one sense, Attis would only be the battleground on which these two opposing dimensions engage, of which he is in turn expression¹⁶⁹. From the ethical point of view, the man who can not decide to which camp he belongs has no choice except to renounce his sexuality utterly¹⁷⁰.

If Così is correct in stressing the meaning of sexuality/procreation/sterility as the key to reading the myth, we cannot however agree completely with his conclusions. First of all, as we have noted, the castration of Agdistis does not correspond at all to a restoration of the "Olympian" order for which the hermaphrodite nature of Agdistis was only a potential threat. Especially in the Arnobius account, Agdistis retains a basic ambiguity with disquieting traits. To this can be added that there is never any hint in the myth of any relationship based on "lack of sexual restraint": Pausanias speaks of Agdistis "falling in love" and Arnobius says that as well as the Mother of the gods, Agdistis loves Attis and entices him with gifts from the wild. The negative evaluation of that relationship is made by the "civilised" world of which King Midas is the representative, but subsequently his behaviour is also criticised and his choice of forcing Attis to get married is not successful.

As for the castration of Attis, a distinction must be made between

¹⁶⁹ The emasculation is "l'episodio mitico che fonda l'uso cultuale dei sacerdoti evirati (e inoltre a seguito di essa Attis muore, a differenza di Agdistis). Ma soprattutto (...) essa si pone al culmine di una fitta trama di contrasti tra due mondi contrapposti, quello civico dell'amore ordinato e istituzionalizzato, e quello agreste del sesso senza freni. Attis di questi contrasti non è certamente il protagonista: egli è soltanto, per così dire, il campo di battaglia. Su di lui si esercitano le violenze e le attrazioni dei due contendenti, in lui si iscrivono, fin dal concepimento irregolare, i tratti alternati dell'uno e dell'altro stile di vita: Attis è continuamente catturato e respinto da una parte e dall'altra", *id.*, p. 31.

¹⁷⁰ "(...) all'uomo che non sa scegliere tra le seduzioni del disordine e la tranquillità promessa dal matrimonio legittimo non resta che rinunciare del tutto alla sessualità", *id.*, p. 32.

the meaning given to this gesture in Pessinous and successive reinterpretations of the myth in Rome. At all events, both in Anatolia and in Italy, the opposition under the sign of sexuality is not between rustic nature/unrestrained sexuality and city/correct sexuality: from the viewpoint of the priesthood of Pessinous, the solution offered by the king is as negative as the love relationship between a man and a deity. In fact, the myth itself speaks against the royal institution. Here it is not a question of contrasting two types of sexuality, one wild and the other “domesticated”, but of founding a reality possible only in Pessinous, a special kind of royalty without a succession achieved biologically. In the presentation of Attis’ pedigree it is noticeable that “sonship” is always separate from sexual union. From Zeus/Jupiter, his “great grandfather”, no conception occurs through sexual intercourse. On the other hand, the emasculation of Attis – though neither that of his father-in-law¹⁷¹ (in Pausanias), nor that of Gallus (Arnobius) – is closely linked with his death, which makes the whole episode meaningful: the Attis who dies is an Attis who has been castrated, born without a father and dead without sons, whose body, consecrated and ritually lamented, founds the extremely peculiar “royalty” of the priesthood of Pessinous. It is not by chance that highest priestly office bears the title of “Attis”; it is not by chance that it is Midas, the prime model of Phrygian royalty, who opposes the relationship Great Mother/Agdistis – Attis. But besides the mythical emasculation of Agdistis and Attis, we find the practice of self-emasculation at the level of ritual. These are the Galli whom we must now consider in order to determine any possible connections between myth and ritual.

3.5. *The Galli: a very special “priesthood”*

Fundamental to understanding the meaning and function of the myth and ritual related to Attis in Rome is his relationship with the Galli. The role of prototype of the mythical castration of Attis for the institution of the “priesthood” of the Galli has almost always been emphasised, even if to different degrees. Scholars have attempted to draw a connection between the episode of the castration of Attis and the ritual mutilation of the Galli as a reflection in myth of a secondary ritual

¹⁷¹ The emasculation of the king and of the father-in-law confirms the end of dynastic succession.

action or conversely, as the mythical foundation of a ritual action¹⁷². This kind of interpretation appears to be too simplistic as, to some extent, it fails to consider that this connection has served different purposes in different periods.

According to my hypothesis, as set out in chapter 2, the emasculation of Attis in the “Phrygian” version of the myth is the basis for an institution that is both political and religious, the institution of high priests in Pessinous, the “non-kings”, who do not coincide *tout court* with the Galli. Attis is not the prototype of the priest/Gallus, but the one who starts off the “genealogy” *sui generis* (!) of the *dynastai* of Pessinous. A brief survey of the sources concerning the Galli and the related problems of interpretations will help to make my position clear.

The earliest references to the Galli come from the *Anthologia Palatina* (Dioscorides, end of the 3rd cent. BCE) although they do not explicitly mention emasculation¹⁷³. More interesting is the fragment attributed to Callimachus¹⁷⁴ in which the term *Gallai* denotes castration that has taken place¹⁷⁵.

The evidence from Polybius¹⁷⁶ and Livy¹⁷⁷, who describe the meeting of the Romans with the Galli at the siege of Sestus by C. Livius Salinator (190 BCE), depict the Galli with all their attributes and prerogatives (μετὰ τύπον καὶ προσηθιδίων and begging to spare the city¹⁷⁸), but with no reference to Pessinous¹⁷⁹. But then, in connection with the expedition of Manlius Vulso to Galatia in 189 BCE, Polybius¹⁸⁰ himself describes the arrival of the Galli at Sangarius where

¹⁷² The positions of various scholars are quoted in Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 27-29; Borgeaud 1996, pp. 56-88; Roller 1999 p. 254.

¹⁷³ The reference to Arcesilaus is quoted by Diogenes Laertius (IV 43, 2), cf. Lane 1996a, p. 118.

¹⁷⁴ Fr. 761 Pfeiffer (*Fragmenta incerti auctoris*), I, p. 478. For critical comments on this attribution cf. Lane 1996a, p. 121.

¹⁷⁵ The eunuchs devoted to the goddess Atargatis in Hierapolis, in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* VIII 26, speak to each other in the feminine as if they were maidens. Cf. also *Anth. Pal.* VII 222, 2-4 = Gow – Page b, Philodemus 26, p. 366. More difficult to interpret is the male/female gender alternation in Catullus c. 63 which may emphasise the transition of Attis to the permanent condition of liminality, cf. Skinner 1993; Strauss Clay 1995.

¹⁷⁶ Polyb., XXI 6, 7.

¹⁷⁷ Liv. XXXVII 9,9.

¹⁷⁸ Polyb. XXI 6,7; Livy talks about *fanatici Galli* (...) *cum sollemni habitu* (Liv., XXXVII 9,9).

¹⁷⁹ Lane attributes the presence of Galli outside Pessinous to missionary activity (Lane 1996a, p. 122).

¹⁸⁰ Polyb., XXI 37, 5.

the Roman army was stationed. They were sent from Pessinous by Attis and Battakes, priests of the Mother of the gods. Similarly dressed in their typical ornaments (ἔχοντες προστηθίδια καὶ τύπους) they announce that the goddess has proclaimed power and victory for the Roman leader.

Roman writers of the 1st cent. CE who describe the Galli in Rome stress particularly the harshness of the practices which they undergo and their unique position in society¹⁸¹.

It is difficult to determine at what time in his life a Gallus would decide to terminate his own male attribute in order to consecrate himself definitively to the goddess. L. Richard¹⁸² analyses two passages from Juvenal's *Satires* which mention the Galli¹⁸³, and referring to the attribute *ingens* of the *semivir*¹⁸⁴ suggests that the operation was performed before full physical development¹⁸⁵. A. Rousselle¹⁸⁶ claims instead that for the Galli the operation was limited to ablation of the testicles. The Galli, emasculating themselves "après l'adolescence et la puberté, après avoir acquis les caractères de la virilité, conservaient après l'ablation des testicules à la fois le désir, l'érection et l'éjaculation de liquide séminal"¹⁸⁷. It would therefore be a cessation of the ability to procreate and not to have sexual relations.

Apart from the sexual activity of the Galli, for which it is legitimate to suppose a certain degree of caricature in the documents that tended to exaggerate its lascivious elements¹⁸⁸, we have to imagine that an operation of this kind – even though it took place in the context of exaltation induced by the obsessive rhythm of songs, dances and repetitive music – was not yet a rash action, since it was performed following fixed times and procedures. The actual tool used for the act, a stone¹⁸⁹ or a sharp sherd¹⁹⁰, certainly did not make the operation easy or lessen its pain. Therefore, apart from the type of emasculation

¹⁸¹ Sources in Sanders 1972.

¹⁸² Richard 1966.

¹⁸³ Juv., *Sat.* II 110-116 and VI 511-521.

¹⁸⁴ Juv., *Sat.* VI vv. 512-513.

¹⁸⁵ The physical development of the subject is above average if emasculation is performed before puberty, it is like that of the other people if the castration is performed after puberty, cf. Richard 1966, p. 62 n.5.

¹⁸⁶ Rousselle 1983.

¹⁸⁷ *Ead.*, p. 158.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Sanders 1978.

¹⁸⁹ Sources in Graillot 1912, p. 296, n. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Sources in Graillot 1912, p. 296, n. 6. He adds that in some cases the operation was performed using sacred knives or bronze swords.

that the devotees suffered, it seems more likely that this operation was performed by an adult rather than by a pre-adolescent. Indeed, the value of that act must have been precisely in the rejection, at a procreating age, of generation.

The sacred category of the Galli, whose entry ritual endorsed in such a drastic way the closure of their own generative cycle, is thus presented as a very peculiar and qualifying aspect of the cult rendered the Great Mother. However, emasculation did not end the cycle of suffering connected with this consecration: on the occasion of the lamentation for Attis, the Galli struck their arms and chest until they started bleeding. If the moment of castration marked the turning point, the passage from a “normal” life to a “different” life marked by a very special relationship with the deity, this operation was only a preparatory moment for the ritual service that linked the Galli to the Great Mother for ever.

There have been several studies to these devotees and the meaning of their action, which projects them outside the community through their rejection of procreation, but not – perhaps – of sexuality¹⁹¹.

Eunuchism is a practice that is deeply rooted in the ancient Near East and there are precedents or important parallels for the Galli in other types of priesthood that involved a correlation between a great goddess and eunuch/effeminate/sex uncertain¹⁹². Borgeaud has correctly seen the Mesopotamian cult personnel called *assinnu*, *galatur* and *kurgarru* as the “préfigurations fonctionnelles des galls de la Mère”¹⁹³. They are connected to Inanna/Ishtar¹⁹⁴ and are noted for their transvestism, references to sexuality, songs and dances¹⁹⁵, but unfortunate-

¹⁹¹ Cf. the next note.

¹⁹² Cf. Roscoe 1996, particularly pp. 213-217 and the bibliography included there. Recently, Smith J.O. 1996, pp. 323-335 has called in question the eunuchism of the Megabyzoi devoted to the Ephesian Artemis. On the eunuchs of the goddess Atargatis cf. Apuleius, *Metamorph.* VIII-IX and Lucian, *De Syria dea* 15-27 and 51-53. Concerning the temple of Artemis at Ephesos cf. Bammer 1984 and 1996; on the cult of the goddess Atargatis at Hierapolis in Syria cf. Hörig 1979; Baslez 1994; Chirassi Colombo 1996 (with previous bibliography); Alo – Franke – Pitzen 1996. Concerning the myth of foundation of the temple at Hierapolis (Luc., *De Syria dea* 19-27) including an emasculation episode that may have been the model for the Galli's behaviour see Albright 1928-1929; Benveniste 1939; Fauth 1969; Michelini Tocci 1996; Grottanelli 1998.

¹⁹³ Borgeaud 1996, p. 78.

¹⁹⁴ On transvestism, homosexual behaviour and emasculation (cultic or otherwise) in the ancient Near East cf. Nöldeke 1907; Bottéro – Petschow 1975; Diakonoff 1977; Bottéro 1980; Groneberg 1986; Maul 1992; Roscoe 1996; Davis-Kimball 1999; Deller 1999. On the classical world cf. Delcourt 1958 and recently Brisson 1997. A “biological” interpretation of castration in Burkert 1996, pp. 47-51.

ly we have no certain proof that self-emasculation was practised by the followers of the Anatolian goddess before the 3rd cent. BCE¹⁹⁶, the period of the political development of the temple in Pessinous, when the word *galli* occurs for the very first time¹⁹⁷.

Even in the absence of direct evidence it cannot be completely excluded that this type of devotee of the Great Mother already existed in ancient times (that is, before the composition of the “Phrygian” version of the Attis myth). In about the 3rd cent. BCE, with the formation of the theocracy at Pessinous and the related structuring of the priestly hierarchy, a reflection comes to maturity that probably connects these devotees of the goddess to the cult of Attis. But in that cult, besides the relationship Attis/castration/Galli, there is also a distinction between the Galli and Attis which is well founded in the mythic tradition. In the version of the myth recorded by Arnobius, Gallus is indeed a different person from Attis, and it is he – not Attis – who by his behaviour becomes the prototype of the Galli¹⁹⁸. According to the version by Arnobius, when Agdistis enters the city, Gallus and his daughter fall into a frenzy¹⁹⁹, he emasculates himself and she cuts off her breasts. The two characters in question act as if they were “guests” at the wedding of Attis (Gallus is not to be identified with Midas) and they are the prototypes of the devotees of the Great Mother who mutilate themselves²⁰⁰. There is no mention of Gallus in Pausanias, but, instead, besides Attis, his father-in-law also castrates himself²⁰¹. Whereas for Attis the consequences are disastrous, neither

¹⁹⁵ A comparative analysis of the characteristics of Galli, Hijra and Galatur, Assinu and Kurgarru in Roscoe 1996; cf. also Roller 1999, pp. 320-325.

¹⁹⁶ According to Lane 1996, p. 132 n. 27, it is not certain that the silver statuette representing a priest discovered at Bayındır (Elmalı) and dating to the Phrygian period represents eunuch (Özgen – Özgen 1988, p. 38 n. 41; Roller 1999, fig. 36); more probable according to Roller 1994, p. 258 n. 81 and 1999, p. 105. Possibly an image of a eunuch also in Diakonoff 1977.

¹⁹⁷ Concerning the introduction of this term and its possible connection with the arrival of the Galatians in Asia Minor cf. Lane 1996a.

¹⁹⁸ Arn., *Adv. nat.* V 7.

¹⁹⁹ The interpretation of Mora 1994, p. 123, who emends the text and identifies Gallus’ daughter with Nana, mother of Attis and daughter of Sangarius, is groundless.

²⁰⁰ While self-emasculation is attested by the myth, the cutting off of breasts is never documented. However, in both cases it is an act connected with the negation of one’s own sexuality and gender. Cf. the Indian goddess Bahucharā Mātā who “cuts off her breasts in an act of ascetism to avoid unwanted heterosexual contact” (Roscoe 1996, p. 219).

²⁰¹ Paus., VII 17, 12.

Gallus nor the father-in-law is said to die. Confirmation that Gallus is the real prototype of the Galli and not Attis – as is instead implicitly accepted by those who see his mythical self-emasculation as the act *par excellence* that makes a Gallus – comes from a passage by Stephen of Byzantium. Citing Alexander Polyhistor, he records a tradition according to which Attis and Gallus castrate themselves, but only the latter reaches the river Terias and settles there. The river is then called Gallus and from it²⁰² those who cut off their genitals are called Galli²⁰³. According to this tradition Gallus is the eponym not only of a river but also of the Galli themselves.

In the account given by Arnobius the same action, i.e. self-castration, causes the death of Attis but not of Gallus. The former founds the cult of his tomb precisely by his death; the latter, by castrating himself but not dying, establishes a connection between mythical time and ritual time. By dying, Attis founds the theocracy of Pessinous, which would otherwise be impossible. By living, Gallus instead “ritualises” this event and thus it becomes “exportable”²⁰⁴. In fact, in Pessinous only the high priest bore the title of “Attis”²⁰⁵ (his second-in-command was Battakes) whereas generally the eunuch-priests were called Galli.

In 204 BCE, the translation of the betyl of the Great Mother from Pessinous to Rome also included the arrival in the capital of her priesthood and its set of mythical and ritual traditions. This “emigration” entails rethinking and a new ideology that would also affect

²⁰² In this passage it is not clear whether it deals with Gallus or the river, but it is not a fundamental problem for the purposes of my interpretation, because in this tradition the name of the river also derives from the name of the human. On the rivers Gallos and Terias cf. Waelkens 1971; Tischler 1977, ss.vv. *Gallos*; *Terias*.

²⁰³ Steph. Byz., s.v. Γάλλος and Herodianus Grammaticus (Lentz, pp. 156-157). According to Stephen of Byzantium, Alexandros Polyhistor depends on Timotheus and Protamidas; concerning their identification and chronology see Lane 1996a, p. 128 n. 21. On the relationship linking Galli (i.e. Galatians), the river Gallus and the Galli (priests), Lane (*idem*) thinks that the name of the river and the priests has to be connected with the presence of the Galatians in Anatolia: the name of the river and the name of the eunuch priests come from them, even if these special cultic appointees of the cult of the Great Mother were not established by the Galatians.

²⁰⁴ In late speculations these two figures were ultimately blended, cf. the Emperor Julian who names Attis and Gallos indifferently as the leading character of the *V Oratio*.

²⁰⁵ Cf. the correspondence between the high priest Attis and the kings of Pergamon (bibliography in n. 1). On the transformations in the organisation of the Pessinous priesthood in the imperial period which led to the distribution of the power among ten priests, all called “Attis”, cf. ch. 2, p. 50 n. 173.

those parts of the Empire in which the reception of the cult of the Great Mother, before the Roman period, had not involved an institutionalisation of the ritual on the Pessinous model (for example Greece, where all the iconography of Attis – except in Piraeus – is from the Roman period²⁰⁶).

It is from Rome and no longer from Pessinous that a new model²⁰⁷ is spread in which numerous elements come into play, even if that model is always presented, in classical sources, as “authentically” Phrygian. As he is “Phrygian”, Attis is seen through the filter of what to Western eyes is “oriental”. That is, he will conform to the cliché which once was Greek and is now *suo modo* Roman, through which what is “other” and “barbarian from the East”²⁰⁸ is seen. But as we know, Attis also represents an anti-monarchical model: in Rome, however, he will no longer be used to contrast royalty with the *sui generis* Pessinous priesthood, but will instead symbolise a “before”, now considered to be superseded, or a “beyond” that is too far away to be dangerous. In Pessinous, through the Attis myth in the “Phrygian” version, a royal model was created, but “overturned” and anomalous. The high priests (and Attis *in primis*) are kings without being born from kings or siring kings. In Rome, the priests from Pessinous represent the “other”, to be conceived and tamed only if pushed back in time or else far away in space²⁰⁹.

The “royal dignity” of the priests from Pessinous is accepted in Rome only to the extent that it remains within the confines of the remote Phrygian city. It is denied as soon as they come out of the “other” dimension (Pessinous) to enter Rome. In this connection, the

²⁰⁶ Cf. Vermaseren 1977, p. 37.

²⁰⁷ Without counting other possible intermediate or different “models”.

²⁰⁸ On the “mannered” outlook of the Orient in classical sources cf. Chirassi Colombo 1974; Ribichini 1981; Piccaluga 1982; Hall 1988 and 1989; Salmon 1997; De Vries 2000. On the different Greek attitude towards the border/the West cf. Brelich 1963a; Piccaluga 1974, pp. 111-132 and 1976; Momigliano 1977 (1975); Jourdain-Annequin 1989; Marco Simón 1993; Kremer 1994. In this sense, especially interesting is the image of the Trojans and Aeneas in Virgil: they are represented as effeminate Galli, but since by defeating the Latins Aeneas becomes the forefather of the future Romans, he was deprived of all his “Oriental” features (cf. Roller 1999, pp. 302-304, and also Wiseman 1984). There is an obvious attempt here at reconciling a positive image of Phrygia – the native country of the ancestors of the Roman people – with a negative representation of the Orient in general.

²⁰⁹ In this connection see the interesting remarks by Beard 1994, according to whom for the Romans the Galli became the symbol of what a male should never be: precisely through their “reversed” behaviour they confirmed the correct way to live. Cf. also Sawyer 1996, pp. 119-129 and Beard – North – Price 1998, I, pp. 165-166.

episode that took place in Rome in 102 BCE is significant: Battakes, the priest from Pessinous, who introduces himself with his own marks of royal dignity, is violently challenged by the Roman populace²¹⁰. Pessinous is an experience which is looked at and compared only to be rejected in a time and space that is “other” with respect to present reality. The supreme high priests of Pessinous are “prince-priests” (*dynastai*), a model that can only become reality in that place and at that price, though it cannot be proposed elsewhere, where it is presented as an “overturned” mythical model to which reference is made in a “subversive” way with respect to a political and “physiological” reality that is completely different. The myth of Attis will therefore act as the mythical foundation for an unrealisable dimension in a reality (which is Roman) in which one is born from one’s own parents, one marries to bring children into the world and one does not love a goddess “passionately” or still less castrate oneself²¹¹.

To summarise, it is not by chance that at Pessinous only the supreme priestly office was called “Attis”, the office that covered or rather replaced royal functions, whereas the eunuch-devotees are called “Galli”²¹². In myth this is reflected in the opposition between an Attis who *by dying* founds a sepulchral/heroic cult and a Gallus/father-in-law(?) who *by living* founds the priesthood of the Galli. They both castrate themselves, but the functions of that act are evidently different: the former dies and *in myth* founds the theocracy of Pessinous; the latter lives and *in ritual* realises the condition of the Great Mother’s “favourite”. This condition is impossible for Attis to attain, as he bases a link with the goddess on the foundation of loving and sexual stimulus (excess) but the condition can be realised for the

²¹⁰ Diod. XXXVI 13 (preserved by Photius, *Bibl.*, pp. 390-391b); Plut. *Marc.* 17, 9-11. Cf. Broughton 1953-1954; Virgilio 1981, pp. 122-124; Wiseman 1984, pp. 118ff.; Boffo 1985, p. 28; Cosi 1987, pp. 138-141; Versnel 1990, p. 150, n. 35. It is important to stress that the reasons for the Roman opposition to the attire of Battakes are of a political and ideological nature and are not simply religious. Neither the priest nor still less the cult of which he is the highest representative is being questioned. Rather, it is the fact that he appears in Rome wearing royal garments, that is, wearing the clothing distinctive of a political form considered to be superseded and no longer acceptable.

²¹¹ Even though he starts from different assumptions and comes to different conclusions, Borgeaud also stresses that Pessinous appears to the Greek and Roman world as a remote place where an ideal of life is achieved that is inconceivable elsewhere (Borgeaud 1996, pp. 87-88).

²¹² In fact, there may have been a hierarchy: Attis at the top, followed immediately by Battakes, and below them the Galli, cf. Polyb. XXI 37, 5. On later events that caused the reform of the Pessinous priesthood see ch. 2, p. 50 n. 173.

Galli, who found that link on a ritual practice (lack of excess).

As soon as Rome imports Attis and the Galli, it reinterprets them according to its own ideological and cultural parameters. In connection with the Great Mother, Attis now functions as representing a “before” that no longer exists and a “different” that is relegated to a distance that, even before being geographical, is cultural. And now Pessinous becomes the symbol of an anticosmic and antistate dimension (with respect to Rome), founded by Attis, that cannot be exported elsewhere. What Attis finds *in myth* the Galli make a reality *in ritual*; but outside Pessinous, this reality becomes subversive²¹³.

In Pessinous not all the Galli are Attis. Only one is, the one who from time to time takes on the role of “king”²¹⁴. In Rome, and this is confirmation that the situation in Pessinous cannot be exported, just when the cult of Attis becomes a “matter of state”, the high priest will be the Archigallus²¹⁵, the exact opposite of the Attis in Pessinous. He

²¹³ The Galli always observe a taboo on certain foods (cf. Burkert 1979, p. 119, with sources); being castrated they are always sterile; the relationship between the Galli and the goddess is permanent: they *always* live, so to speak, in a mythical dimension. The perception of the cult of Attis as “antithetical” in comparison with the Roman system of values – that can be defined and affirmed precisely through their “reverse” – shows astonishing parallels with what was to happen to Adonis in classical Greece (on which cf. Ribichini 1981, pp. 143-144): the tragicomic representation of the myths (Graillot 1912, pp. 84-87; Picard 1955a; Paillet 1969; Sanders 1978, pp. 1084-1086; Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 75 nn. 63-64; Coleman 1990; Wootton 1999); the faithful are prevalently women, slaves, eunuchs (Graillot 1912, pp. 145ff.); the day of mourning is a bad omen for military initiatives (cf. Suet., *Otho* 8). On the perception of the Galli in terms of absolute otherness aimed at defining the Roman identity cf. also Beard 1994 and Sawyer 1996, pp. 119-129 who, adopting the comments made by Beard, writes as follows: “In the context of gender construction, the image of the Magna Mater cult with its eunuch priests provides an example of what maleness should not be, thus reinforcing the accepted norms of what it should be. In Roman terms, ‘the eunuch gallus was both a non-man and a man who broke the rules of proper male behaviour’. The *galli* were not only emasculated by self-mutilation, but apparently also by wearing women’s clothes and having long hair” (pp. 121-122). See also Williams 1999.

²¹⁴ An imperial reform, probably under Claudius, increases the number of “Attis” to ten. This reorganization, apparently a political operation to ease the struggles for the sacred and political control of the temple between indigenous elements and the Galatians, still retains the distinction between high priests and eunuch-devotees.

²¹⁵ On the Archigallus cf. Momigliano 1932; Carcopino 1942 pp. 76-171; Lambrechts – Bogaert, 1969. Carcopino thought that the title of Archigallus was created *ex novo* by Claudius; Momigliano, on the contrary, stressed the existence of this title in earlier times. Under Antoninus Pius this term is conferred on the high priest of the Metroac cult (cf. Lambrechts – Bogaert 1969, pp. 410-411). Lambrechts and Bogaert hypothesised that since the title of Attis was given to the ten romanized priests directed by an *archiereus*, the Galli were led by a eunuch called “archigallus”. If they are correct, the office of “archigallus” at Pessinous would have a different function from elsewhere in the Empire (*ibid.*).

is Roman, has a wife, sacrifices for the emperor (pro-state, pro-cosmos, pro-procreation) and belongs fully within Roman society, whereas Battakes, a vice-king who is a native of Pessinous, is a “dismissed king”²¹⁶ during the events in Rome in 102 BCE.

In Rome, Attis becomes separated from his links with a royal political dimension and becomes instead the symbol of impossible reality, sustained on the mythical plane and denied on the historical plane. It is not by chance that, under Roman rule, Pessinous does not expand but instead is tending towards decline²¹⁷. It no longer represents, as in the Attalid period, an importance as a place that is real, historical and geographical, but only as being in a completely “different” dimension. This is why Attis can acquire heroic/divine characteristics that make sense precisely from being the “reverse” of the real world. The Galli, who, having made an extreme choice, persist in a “flight from history”, pay for it with the price of being completely marginalised. The state’s total control of the Metroac cult, the making of the ceremonies and of the priesthood into an institution, are not determined by an unconditional acceptance, but by the need to channel through ritual the rebellious forces that the cult is potentially able to unleash²¹⁸.

3.6. *The “mysteries” of Attis*

As a preliminary, it should be emphasised that in this paragraph I am not concerned in general with evidence for the *mysteria* of the Great Mother unless Attis is involved. The evidence for the “mysteries” that involve Attis refers to the imperial age, causing us to reflect upon the influence which Roman re-interpretation had on these ceremonies.

Before analysing the sources it is important to discuss the problem of the very definition of “mysteries” and terms as *teletai*, *orgia*, (and *mystai*). In fact, they do not have univocal meanings in the ancient

²¹⁶ Cf. Plut., *Marius* 17; Diod. XXXVI, 13 (preserved by Photius, *Bibl.*, pp. 390-391b). Diodorus explicitly mentions the royal vestment and crown worn by Battakes during his journey in Rome: χρυσούν τε γὰρ στέφανον εἶχεν ὑπερμεγέθη καὶ στολὴ ἀνθίνην διάχρυσον, βασιλικὴν ἀξίαν ἐπιφαίνουσαν. On the privilege of wearing the symbols of royal rank (a diadem and a purple mantle) on solemn occasions, that was granted to some priests connected with important temples in Asia Minor, cf. Boffo 1985, pp. 27-28.

²¹⁷ Cf. Virgilio 1981, pp. 120-128.

²¹⁸ Cf. Chirassi Colombo 1982, pp. 324-325.

world and so we need always to define precisely the actual periods and data²¹⁹. It should be added that, even among modern scholars, there is no agreement about the meaning to be given these terms. Above all, the adjective “mystic” has different interpretations at present, which entails differing evaluations of the documents in which they occur²²⁰. In the light of these premises we pass to analyse the sources.

W.M. Ramsay’s theories on the presumed mystery cults in Anatolia, that would have involved both Cybele and Attis in the 7th century²²¹, are certainly to be excluded.

Orgiastic but not explicitly mystic aspects are commonly attributed to the cult of the Great Mother from the very earliest times of her entry into Greece, whereas Attis is rarely involved in them²²². The meagre and obscure evidence does not allow us, then, to establish “which” Attis (the king or the priest?) was represented alongside the deity and especially, which role he had.

Neanthes of Cyzicus tells us that there is a *mystikos logos* on Attis, but provides no further information²²³. The account by Pausanias about the cult of Attis at Dyme²²⁴, usually used by scholars to prove the existence of a “secret” about Attis, states the complete opposite. In fact, the text is as follows: “Ἀττις δὲ ὅστις ἦν, οὐδὲν οἶός τε ἦν ἀπόρητον ἐς αὐτὸν ἐξευρεῖν²²⁵. As is easily seen, here Pausanias simply states that he does not know any secret about Attis and in fact, immediately afterwards, he cites Hermesianax, who gave a “public” account of what happened to Attis, that is in a poem. Only at the price of supposing the omission of an ὄν after ἀπόρητον, as has been suggested, could the sentence be read as follows: “Who Attis was I have been unable to discover because that is a religious secret”²²⁶. At this point

²¹⁹ In the classical age these terms are not used indiscriminately, but from the Hellenistic period they can be used to define different phenomena (cf. Brelich 1985, pp. 112-122; Burkert 1987, pp. 7-11).

²²⁰ Cf. e.g. Brelich 1985, pp. 112-122; Sabbatucci 1965; Bianchi 1965; Sfameni Gasparro 1984 and 1987; Burkert 1987, pp. 7-11; Cancik 1993.

²²¹ Ramsay 1911-1912; 1912; 1917. It is not certain that the god involved in these mysteries is Attis, cf. Cosi 1976; Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 65-66.

²²² In fact, the only source for this is the debated passage by Demosthenes (*De cor.* 259-260), on which cf. n. 65.

²²³ FGrHist 84 F 37 = Harpocr. s.v. “Ἀττις.

²²⁴ Paus., VII 17, 9-12.

²²⁵ Here I follow the critical edition by Casevitz – Lafond 2000.

²²⁶ Cf. Jones 1988 (1933), p. 267 n. 2. It is astonishing that several scholars quote this passage without emendation and translate it according to the restored version.

the account by Hermesianax seems to be completely disconnected from the secret discourse of which, therefore, nothing emerged.

There are no valid reasons for inserting the emendation in question into the text since it is completely intelligible in terms of syntax and content just as it is. Pausanias states that he did not find any “secret” tradition, at least in Dyme, and so he is forced to dig into his store of knowledge to give a clearer picture of Attis to whom, together with Mother Dindymene, a sanctuary is dedicated²²⁷.

The evidence supplied by Nicander²²⁸ is more interesting. It refers to the *Ῥείης Λοβρίνης θαλάμαι* and to the *ὄργαστήριον ᾿Αττεῶ*. According to Nicander’s scholiast²²⁹, the *thalamai* are underground places dedicated to Rhea in which were deposited the *vires* of those who celebrate the cult of Rhea and Attis. No information is given about the *orgastērion*, but it is not hard to imagine that it, too, was connected with the *thalamai*. However, it is important to emphasise that, for Attis, the scholiast does not use the “Phrygian” version of the myth, as might be expected, but the “Lydian” version. This is further proof that the “Phrygian” myth does not represent the mythical presupposition of the castration ritual. Emasculation must have been a prerogative of certain devotees of the Great Mother already in a period before it was reinterpreted in the “Phrygian” version. The mythical castration of Attis, as we have seen, is first of all a “political” castration, although it could have been formulated only within an ideology that accepted it, as the one in which the eunuchs dedicated to the cult of the Great Mother were active, must have been.

Eutecnius the Sophist²³⁰ tells us that, in his time²³¹, the Phrygians continued to celebrate ritually the *τῆς Ῥέας ὄργια* and the marriage of Attis and all that followed it; in this case there is no reference to castration. The *gamos* cannot be derived with absolute certainty from the “Phrygian” version of the myth, it is present in the account by Herodotus – who, as we have seen, is better connected with the

²²⁷ Pausanias too mentions a sanctuary devoted to the Mother Dindymene at Patrai, where Attis too was venerated. But Pausanias adds that there is no statue of him (Paus., VII 20, 2). In this case also we do not know anything about the existence of a mystery cult.

²²⁸ *Alexipharm.* v. 8, Gow – Scholfield, p. 94.

²²⁹ *Schol. ad Nic. Alexiph.* v. 8, Geymonat a, p. 32.

²³⁰ *Τῶν Νικάνδρου Ἀλεξιφαρμακῶν μετὰφρασις*, Geymonat b, p. 26.

²³¹ This author, about whom we know very little, can be dated between the 3rd and 5th centuries CE, cf. Fornaro – Geinze 1998.

“Lydian” tradition – and in the account by Diodorus²³². Furthermore, it is not even possible to exclude with similar certainty the existence of a rite of *hierogamia*. Finally, the use of the term *orgia* is not certain evidence for the existence of “mysteries” in the strict sense of the term, that is, of initiation practices of an esoteric kind.

The most interesting fact that seems to emerge from the passage by Nicander and the relevant comments is the link between the *thalamai* – places traditionally associated with the cult of the Great Mother²³³ – and the *vires* of those who consecrated themselves to her. The gesture of self-emasculation that ratified the special relationship established between a particular class of devotees and the Great Mother is certainly not a spontaneous gesture due to a temporary fit of madness. It requires a specific practice that envisions the ritual preservation of the severed attributes, deposited specifically in the *thalamai*. Was it a marriage *sui generis*? This cannot be said for certain, but this practice does seem to be a particularly important feature since, appropriately revised, it will appear as a basic element of the “mysteries” *par excellence* of the Great Mother, the *taurobolia*, as we shall see.

Two inscriptions from Pessinous that can be dated to the 1st cent. CE are evidence for the presence of τῶν τῆς θεοῦ μυστηρίων μύσται defined Ἀτταβοκαῖοι²³⁴. If the term *mystai* and the reference to the *mysteria* seem to take us back unequivocally to a mystery context, the title *Attabokaioi* that the associates give themselves poses certain problems. Scholars have generally recognised the name of Attis in the first part of the word. One exception is Ramsay, who interprets the first part of the name as the Greek transliteration of the Phrygian word for goat²³⁵ and the second part as a priestly office²³⁶, even though he ends up connecting the term with the name of Attis. As it is difficult to establish with certainty the connection of these goat-priests with Attis,

²³² On an alabaster figurine representing Attis are inscribed the terms *neogamos* and *basileus*. This evidence, dating to the 2nd – 3rd century CE, shows a complex image of the cult of Attis: the figure holds a sheep in his arms; the whip of the Galli, the pine tree and various symbols of the *taurobolium* are also represented (Chadwick 1952).

²³³ On the presence and meaning of this term in the epigrams of the *Anthologia Palatina* related to the Galli, cf. Gow 1960, p. 91.

²³⁴ Strubbe 1984, p. 221, nos. 17-18.

²³⁵ Ramsay 1920. As a possible etymology for the name Attis, Arnobius (*Adv. nat.* V 6) quotes the Phrygian term *attagus*, that in fact means he-goat.

²³⁶ Cf. the Phrygian term *akenanogavos*. It may also denote a priestly office (of the high priest?), in the second part –*gavos* can be read, which is to be compared with the ending suggested by Ramsay for *Attabokaioi*, cf. ch. 2, p. 37 n. 117.

the fact that a circle of *mystai* of the Great Mother had this name does not itself necessarily imply that Attis had played “an important part in the mysteries of the goddess”²³⁷. It could in fact be a more ancient name linked to a priestly function then re-used by these devotees without any reference to the character in question.

Also problematic is the reference to a *μυστήριον Ἀττει* recorded in an inscription from Sardis from the 2nd cent. CE within which, however, we do not know what type of “mysteries” were practised²³⁸.

In brief, even though the epigraphic and literary evidence sometimes also mentions Attis in reference to the *orgia* or “mysteries” of the Great Mother, in our present state of knowledge it is not possible to determine precisely in what extent he was involved.

There has been a certain reluctance to accept that, in fact, much of the evidence refers to the mysteries of Attis or of the Great Mother, alluding to the Galli. This is because “only through very individual channels and by retaining a significance all of its own can this gruesome practice be fitted into the context of initiatory typology”²³⁹. And yet, in spite of the prejudice of some modern scholars, it seems that the very key to understanding the “mysteries of Attis” is to be found in the meaning that was given to the sacrifice of their own manhood by this particular group of followers. Beyond the schematisations and the typological abstractions lies a fact that, in the eyes of their contemporaries, the practices of the Galli could be assimilated to the “mysteries”, as is clearly apparent in the following sources.

Apart from the text of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus²⁴⁰, in which there is in connection with one Gallus a whole set of terminological references evidently derived from the mysteries, the evidence that exhibits a relationship between the mysteries and the Galli is fundamental. Yet it can be only hypothesised that the esoteric rites that, according to Julian, were performed in the same period as the public rites, are identifiable as the mutilation of the Galli²⁴¹: Minucius Felix establishes a clear connection between the mysteries of the Great Mother and their castration²⁴². Even the evidence provided by the Gnostic Naassenes shows that, at least in the eyes of “external” spectators,

²³⁷ Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 70.

²³⁸ Vermaseren 1977-1989, I, p. 138, n. 464.

²³⁹ Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 77.

²⁴⁰ Parsons 1971.

²⁴¹ Jul., *V or.* 169a.

²⁴² Min. Fel., *Oct.* XXIII 1-4.

there was a close link between the Galli and the mysteries²⁴³.

It seems obvious that, on the basis of the evidence that has reached us, we cannot pronounce with certainty on the existence and content of the mystery cults of Cybele and Attis. With a greater margin of probability we can state that their contemporaries considered the practices of the Galli in connection with the mystery rites.

In fact, I think that it is possible to put forward the hypothesis that the “mysteries” of the Great Mother and Attis, attested in the period of the Empire, were developed precisely from a rethinking and re-reading of the figure of the Gallus who, while not appearing explicitly, does remain in their background. I refer to that detail of the rite which we know of principally through a series of inscriptions from the end of the 1st/beginning of the 2nd cent. CE to the end of the 4th cent. CE, that is to say, the *taurobolium*²⁴⁴. Whatever its most ancient form may have been, in the Western world it appears as a sacrificial ritual closely linked with the Great Mother alongside whom there is also Attis, at first sporadically and then from 228 CE constantly. This ritual involved the sacrifice of a bull and a special procedure for its blood and/or its *vires*.

Two fundamental studies as collections of sources, one by R. Duthoy²⁴⁵ and the other by J.B. Rutter²⁴⁶, have independently proposed a development of this practice, which from a “public” cult in favour of the emperor with a political function became a “private” cult for the benefit of individuals. In particular, this final phase of the *taurobolium* is documented by Prudentius, dated to the 4th century CE²⁴⁷. The theory of a three-phases evolution of the *taurobolium*, especially as presented in Duthoy’s monograph, has been criticised by some scholars²⁴⁸. These three phases, according to Duthoy, would be: 1) about 160 CE the *taurobolium* was incorporated in the cult of Cybele; 2) subsequently (about 225 CE), the ceremony with the *cernus* became

²⁴³ Hipp., *Ref.* V 9, 10-11.

²⁴⁴ An inscription discovered recently at Beneventum has enabled the date of the earliest evidence for the *taurobolium* in the Roman world to be changed from 160 CE to the earlier period between Flavians and Trajan; cf. Adamo Muscettola 1994, pp. 96-101. In this inscription, also quoted in AE 1994, n. 534, p. 165, with some differences in the reading, there is a dedication to Attis and *Minerva Paracenta*.

²⁴⁵ Duthoy 1969.

²⁴⁶ Rutter 1968.

²⁴⁷ Prud., *Perist.* X vv. 1006-1050

²⁴⁸ A special study on the *taurobolium* with a bibliographical update and a survey of the different opinions in Marco Simón 1997, cf. also Marco Simón 1999.

part of the rite; 3) the *taurobolium* developed into the baptism with blood (about 300 CE). Turcan in particular has suitably objected that among the undated epigraphs, which are therefore not considered by Duthoy, there could be one that totally undermines the construction²⁴⁹. In fact, a third of existing epigraphs are excluded from Duthoy's analysis, too many to provide sufficient foundation for it. I consider that the prejudicial exclusion of three inscriptions from Rome that, in spite of being recent, used verbs attributed by Duthoy to the first phase, comprises another serious impasse to his model²⁵⁰. On the other hand, the statement that, in the transition from the second to the third phases, due to the influence of Christianity and the baptismal rite, the change would not pertain to the purpose of the sacrifice so much as to the ritual, to me frankly seems to be forced²⁵¹. It would be possible only if one surmises, as does Duthoy, that the *cernus* mentioned in some epigraphs contained the blood and not the *vires* of the bull: at first a limited sprinkling that in the third phase would become complete.

As Borgeaud has made quite clear, the fact that the epigraphs which mention the ritual treatment of the bull's *vires* – for Duthoy peculiar to the first phase – do not mention the *cernus* – peculiar to the second phase – are not absolute proof that the two rites were not connected²⁵². From the documentation that is available, according to Borgeaud, it is not possible to prove an evolution of the rite. Right from the beginning (in the Western world) it was presented as aristocratic or at least linked with the élite, without any connection to the calendar, and its dates seem to be variable as they are determined by a divine command. The fact that it is an initiation rite and private would not prevent it having important political implications and lastly, its mystery nature would be particularly obvious in 4th century CE inscriptions. According to the evidence from Prudentius²⁵³, which is the main proof supporting the hypothesis that the *taurobolium* evolved, this ritual ran as follows: the protagonist of the rite, after lowering

²⁴⁹ Turcan 1972, p. 85 n. 1.

²⁵⁰ Duthoy 1969, p. 111, does not include inscriptions nos. 18, 19, 20 in his catalogue (= *cit.* VI 505, 506, 507); their dates are between 295 and 313 and therefore they belong to the second or third phase, although they contain the verb *facere*, which is characteristic of the first phase.

²⁵¹ Cf. the critical remarks in Smith J.Z. 1990, pp. 102-103.

²⁵² "Il est vrai que les deux éléments ne figurent jamais ensemble dans les inscriptions. Mais les inscriptions n'avaient pas pour fonction de décrire le rite. L'allusion suffisait, pour situer l'occasion de la dédicace" (Borgeaud 1996, p. 160).

himself into the hole, would be flooded by the blood of the sacrificial animal flowing through the slits of a grating deliberately placed at the entry of the ditch. Unfortunately, this dramatic evidence is suspect. First of all, the rite described is not explicitly connected with the Great Mother, then the main actors do not belong to her priesthood²⁵⁴, and the actual *fossa sanguinis* has no counterpart in the archaeological finds²⁵⁵. Prudentius may instead have been inspired by the author of the *Contra paganos*²⁵⁶, the only one to connect the pit with the *taurobolium*²⁵⁷.

Borgeaud²⁵⁸ has advanced our understanding of the ritual and what it means. Adopting a suggestion of Burkert²⁵⁹, Borgeaud established a functional relationship between the taurobolic rite and the mythical account given by Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* II 15. In a context that is unanimously acknowledged to be of Orphic inspiration, there is a reference to the violence suffered by Deo at the hands of Zeus, the resulting anger of the goddess and the peacemaking that occurs through the castration of a he-goat whose genitals are thrown by Zeus onto the lap of Deo. What is particularly noteworthy is that Clement explicitly connects this myth to the Phrygian ritual of which he records the *symbolon*. Although some scholars have glimpsed, in the light of this evidence, the possibility of reading the *taurobolium* as a substitution rite in respect of the self-emasculation of the Galli, the objection has been raised that women also took part in the *taurobolium*²⁶⁰. However, as can easily be argued, it is precisely the substitution that allows the women to take part in a rite from which otherwise they would be “physiologically” excluded!²⁶¹

In my opinion, instead, it is precisely the “substitute” function of the sacrifice of the bull that gives us the key that is particularly suited to understanding the “mysteries” of the Great Mother and of Attis, as well as evidence of a further elaboration of the mythical and ritual traditions connected with them.

As is well known, Clement follows the mythical account described

²⁵³ Prud., *Peristeph.* X 1006-1050.

²⁵⁴ There *flamines* and a *summus sacerdos* are mentioned.

²⁵⁵ On the necessary caution in examining the Prudentius report cf. Richard 1969.

²⁵⁶ Cod. Paris. 8084, ff. 156a-158b.

²⁵⁷ Borgeaud 1996, pp. 158-168.

²⁵⁸ *Id.*, pp. 156ff.

²⁵⁹ Burkert 1979, p. 202 n. 17.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 116; Thomas 1984, p. 1523.

²⁶¹ Cf. Borgeaud 1996, p. 165.

above with a *symbolon* that, with some variations, is also recorded by Firmicus Maternus²⁶². Clement writes: "I have eaten of the drum, I have drunk of the cymbal, I have carried the *kernos*, I have come down from the *pastos*"²⁶³. There are two sets of actions: the first two of which refer to the sacred instruments of the cult of Cybele. Firmicus Maternus²⁶⁴ first records the formula in Latin: *de tympano manducaui, de cymbalo bibi et religionis secreta perdidici* and then in the Greek version, the final part of which ends with the words γέγονα μύστης Ἀττεως. The various versions of the *symbolon* have given rise to different attempts at interpretation. Scholars oscillate between various hypotheses: the variation of formula could reflect the variety of temples in which the ritual was performed; there must have been a censure of the last part of the Clementine formula that was replaced in some Metroac communities with the one recorded by Firmicus so that the mysteries would not be profaned; the formulae recorded by Clement and Firmicus are incomplete and one completes the other; the different formulae could correspond to different degrees of initiation²⁶⁵.

Thus according to the evidence from Clement, there was a "Phrygian" myth comparable to Deo's, closely connected with the *symbolon* that is reported. We can probably assume that the "similarity" lies in the episode of the castration of the animal. In the myth about Deo, the castration of the animal is clearly presented as a substitution of the castration of Zeus, who was tainted with the crime of raping the goddess.

If we consider as a whole the epigraphic evidence about the *taurobolium* and the references to myth and ritual in Clement's writing,

²⁶² On the meaning to attribute to this formula cf. the various positions of the scholars reported in Turcan 1982, comment *ad loc.*, pp. 286-287.

²⁶³ Clem. Alex., *Protr.* II 15.

²⁶⁴ Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. relig.* XVIII 1-2.

²⁶⁵ On the positions of the various scholars see Pastorino 1956, pp. 187-190; Turcan 1982, pp. 286-287; Turcan 1996, pp. 52-54. Another very vexed passage in Firmicus Maternus' work is that regarding the description of a nocturnal ritual characterised by mourning over an idol lying on a litter (Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. relig.* XXII). This mourning lasted a long time and at the end the devotees were exhausted. The light stressed the passage to a second liturgical phase: the priest anointed the people attending the ceremony and then uttered a formula in Greek: θαρρεῖτε μύσται τοῦ θεοῦ σεσωμένον· ἔσται γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐκ πόνων σωτηρία. So the salvation of the god also brings salvation to the people attending the ritual. Firmicus does not say which god it is, and scholars are divided in ascribing this ritual to Osiris, Attis or other "syncretic" figures. Podeman Sørensen 1989b has convincingly demonstrated the similarities between this ritual and certain Egyptian religious practices and has tipped the scales in favour of Osiris.

we succeed in sketching a fairly coherent picture of what the “mysteries” of Cybele and Attis could have been in the 2nd cent. CE in the West.

Burkert had already noted the parallelism between the treatment reserved for the *vires* of the Galli – of Attis in Arnobius – and the *vires* of the bull in the *taurobolium*²⁶⁶. Furthermore, as I have tried to show above, for the Galli emasculation is the visible and permanent sign of a privileged connection with the Great Mother. They pay for this connection by being completely marginalised by the “civil” world and Roman citizens enjoy that relationship only by reflex. The Galli act as mediators between the “otherness” and the “norm”: able to foretell the future or heal the sick, they still remain separated from the social group. In addition, as is clear from the sources, the sacrifice of the Galli could be conceived as a “mystery” ritual. The definitive organisation of the *taurobolium* in connection with the cult of the Great Mother (2nd cent. CE) is contemporary with the institutionalisation of the “Archigallosship” that, as we have seen, coincides with an appropriation in the Roman sense of the supreme priestly office belonging to the cult of the Great Mother and with a development of the “divine” cult of Attis. The Archigallus, on the other hand, undoubtedly assumes a role of primary importance in the *taurobolium* of which he is the authorised executor. So this practice could be conceived as an “extension” of the mysteries of the Galli to a wider public, no longer restricted, due to the permanent mutilation, to the masculine world of slaves or freemen. This can take place only through a “revised reading” of the Gallus and the replacement of his real sacrifice with one that is symbolic. This revised reading, on the other hand, runs in parallel with the March rituals, remaining the prerogative of a relatively restricted circle of followers²⁶⁷. It happens within a world, the Roman world, that has emptied and re-interpreted not only the myth but the actual ritual connected with Attis. Not only is the Attis ritually lamented in Rome a very different person from the Attis of Pessinous, but the supreme priestly office of Pessinous, that shares its name with him, has no equivalent in Rome. Instead it is replaced by the Archigallus who, through the *taurobolium*, makes the substitution impossible otherwise. The *mystai* are the Galli/non-Galli, those who castrate themselves without castrating themselves.

²⁶⁶ Burkert 1979, p. 120 and n. 17-18.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Borgeaud 1996, pp. 156-157.

This interpretation of the taurobolic “mysteries” as a “substitution” finds further confirmation in the *symbolon* recorded by Clement and Firmicus. The drum and the cymbal are typical instruments of the Galli, here used ritually by the *mystai*, and are often depicted on the altars of the *taurobolium*²⁶⁸. Even the carrying of the *kernos* could allude to the taurobolic ritual while access to the *pastos*, whatever nuance one might wish to ascribe it²⁶⁹, can only recall the *thalamai* in which the *vires* of those emasculated were ritually buried. Why not propose the hypothesis, then, in the mystery ritual, of a sort of imitation of the performance of the Galli by the use of the *vires* from bulls? The process inaugurated in myth by the burial of the severed attributes of Attis by the Great Mother in the version of Arnobius and repeated ritually by the Galli in the March rituals²⁷⁰ could, in mystery practices, be reinterpreted in the light of cathartic and (possibly) soteriological requirements. Thus, in respect of the “mysteries” of Attis, it would not be a practice that is different from the traditional so much as a reinterpretation of the earliest ritual, in which Orphic speculations certainly played a role.

According to the interpretation I proposed here, the *taurobolium* was therefore a substitution rite that allowed the initiate to “substitute himself” for the Gallus, creating a link with the Great Mother who passed through the “mysteries”, bypassing the “mediation” of the eunuch.

3.7. *The astralisation of Attis*

In Rome Attis acquires characteristics that increasingly differentiate him both from the “hero” of Pessinous and from the character who in Greece, from the 4th century BCE onwards, appears sporadically but significantly alongside the goddess.

²⁶⁸ Cf. e.g. Duthoy 1969 nos. 11; 17; 18; 19; 22; 23; 24; 25; 33; 75; 85. Cf. also Borgeaud 1996, p. 164.

²⁶⁹ From an exhaustive analysis of the evidence Lane 1988 proved that it cannot refer to the temple cella, but to a fabric traditionally connected with marriage.

²⁷⁰ Cf. *Schol. ad Nic. Alexiph.* v. 8, Geymonat pp. 32-33. The inscription *CIL* XIII, 510 (Vermaseren 1977-1989, V, p. 87, n. 228), discovered at Lactora (Aquitania), in which it is said that the 24th of March 239 CE (*Sanguis* day), *Valeria gemina vires escepit* (*sic!*) *Eutyctis*, is extensively discussed. Graillot 1912, p. 317 hypothesises a reference to the entry of Eutyctes into the assembly of Galli. According to Carcopino 1942, pp. 90-91, however, the inscription has nothing to do with the emasculation of the Galli.

From the 2nd cent. CE, the documentation on Attis provides evidence of a speculative line that clearly ascribes a cosmic dimension to him. In particular, in the cultic complex of Ostia dedicated to the Great Mother, the *Campus Magnae Matris*, there is an area that is connected but autonomous, dedicated to him, the *Attideion*²⁷¹. From there come some interesting finds. The first is a marble statue of a bull which displays between its horns a crescent moon decorated with a star²⁷². The second is an image of Attis, castrated, in which it is possible to see the operating instrument and the actual severed testicles²⁷³. The third find is a statue which portrays Attis stretched out on a rock, half naked, with female characteristics²⁷⁴. Its head is adorned with fruit, it wears a radiate crown and a Phrygian beret surmounted by a lunar crescent with spikes of wheat sticking out from it; in the left hand it holds the *pedum* and in the right a bunch of wheat, pine cones and pomegranates. The bearded head on which it reclines could represent the river Sangarius since the rock is furrowed with waves. If the image of a castrated Attis refers us to the “Phrygian” myth, the image of Attis as a deity with pantocratic attributes, is evidence for a reinterpretation of him in cosmological terms.

In a recent study, Turcan proposes an interesting hypothesis that would allow the process of the astralisation of Attis to date back to the 1st century BCE²⁷⁵. Referring to the *Valerius pontifex* cited by Arnobius (*Adv. nat.* V 7) in connection with the name of Attis’ fiancée, Turcan identifies him with the augur M. Valerius Messala, consul in 53 BCE. He would be the author of a treatise in which the identity of Ianus and Aion was established on the basis of the Pythagorean equivalent *ia = mia*. The Greek term *Ias* plays an important role in the Arnobian version of the myth as it can be related both to the violets that grow from the blood of Attis and of his betrothed and with her name. This leads Turcan to think that “Attis avait pour lui un rapport avec Janus-Aion conçu comme *vis caeli maxima*”²⁷⁶. Thus a process of interpreting Attis that emphasised his cosmic aspect must have begun in Rome even before he took on those features of officialdom that culminated

²⁷¹ Calza 1946-1947 dates it to the end of 2nd century CE.

²⁷² Vermaseren 1977-1987, II, p. 113, n. 369.

²⁷³ *Id.*, p. 119, n. 384.

²⁷⁴ *Id.*, p. 123, n. 394.

²⁷⁵ Turcan 1996a.

²⁷⁶ *Id.*, p. 389. However, it should be remembered that scholars do not agree on the identity of this *Valerius pontifex*, cf. *supra*, n. 122.

in the reforms of Claudius and Antoninus Pius. The iconographic and epigraphic evidence from the imperial period confirms this trend that would be found, converging and sometimes combining with “solar” theology, in the more mature reflections of the Neo-Platonists²⁷⁷.

Two short hymns dedicated to Attis²⁷⁸ go back to the 1st century of our era²⁷⁹ on which the Gnostic sect of the Naassenes (2nd cent. CE) used their own exegetical sieve²⁸⁰. In these compositions, especially the first, Attis is given a series of epithets that correspond to an equivalent number of divine beings. The latter, who belong to various religious traditions although they are all connected in some way with Attis²⁸¹, are identified by the author(s) of the hymn with Attis himself. The aim of this arrangement, that is also attested for some of the mythical characters cited (Adonis, Osiris or the god Men) in philosophical speculations and the iconography of a later period – which is evidence that it belongs to a more widespread ideology – is evidently to reinforce the prerogatives of Attis in a cosmological direction. The closing verse of the second hymn, which defines him as ποιμὴν λευκῶν ἄστρον²⁸², is unequivocal evidence for an astralisation of Attis.

The context in which the two hymns were composed is not very clear²⁸³. Nevertheless, they share the spiritual climate of the period in which they were composed, strongly marked by the tendency to ascribe to certain deities the epithets and prerogatives that belong to

²⁷⁷ Besides the statue of the Lateran (Vermaseren 1977-1989, III, p. 123 n. 394), the image of Attis with a star on his clothes or cap can be also found in Vermaseren 1966, p. 33, who refers to coins of Antoninus Pius, M. Aurelius and Commodus from Cyzicus, which represent Attis bending, formally similar to the statue of Lateran, with the body bestrewn with stars (Pl. XIV, 2) and he mentions as parallels some coins from Ancyra and Pessinous (p. 33, n. 2). The small bronze described on p. 51 (Pl. XXXII, 1 and 4) has a starry *pileus* and Vermaseren gives as a parallel a terracotta from Cyprus: “A terra cotta head of Attis from Cyprus is decorated with a row of rosettes” (p. 51, n. 2). See also the image of a Phrygian cap surmounted by a rising moon and a star between two torches coming from Isola Sacra that can be dated to the 2nd century CE (Floriani Squarciapino 1962, p. 10, n. 2 [Tav. IV]). Finally cf. Turcan 1978.

²⁷⁸ Hipp., *Ref.* V 9, 8-9. Critical editions of the hymns: Schneidewin 1848; Heitsch 1963-1964; Wolbergs 1971.

²⁷⁹ According to the hypothesis of Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1902.

²⁸⁰ Cf. *infra*.

²⁸¹ On all the evidence concerning the association between Attis and the above-mentioned deities in the imperial age, see Sfameni Gasparro 1981.

²⁸² Hipp., *Ref.* V 9, 9.

²⁸³ Hippolytus states that they were declaimed in the theatre. Cf. Nero’s *performances*, Cass. Dio, *Hist. Rom.* LXI 20 and *schol. ad Pers., Sat.* I 93 (Jahn, p. 269). On scenic representations of the Attis story, cf. n. 213.

other divine beings with their resulting elevation to the rank of cosmic beings²⁸⁴.

It can be noted that in the last part of the first hymn a series of epithets is listed that, according to the author, the Phrygians attributed to Attis. A rapid analysis of these attributes takes us back to the mythical tradition on Attis, according to a version that is very like the one given by Arnobius²⁸⁵. Other adjectives, instead, recall the iconography with which Attis was usually represented in the imperial period²⁸⁶. Of particular interest are the two attributes of “corpse” and “god” that occur, in the context of the hymn, in direct sequence, an indication that in the late period as well the close connection between the death of Attis and his attainment of divine status persisted, one of his characteristics right from the earliest documentation.

The fact that these hymns were recited in a theatre, whatever their origin may have been, is proof that the astral projection of Attis was not limited to esoteric circles or cults but is one of his fairly common and well-known attributes in this period. To special speculations instead are attributed those attempts at reinterpretation of “popular” material according to an exegesis that significantly alters its meaning.

The next chapter of this book is specifically on these re-readings of Attis, his myth and his cult. As we shall see, in these types of exegesis very little remains of the “original” Attis, if he ever existed. Instead he becomes an instrument and symbol of various ideological intentions, that often oppose each other. Even so, I consider it necessary to examine them in order to distinguish, in the dossier on Attis, interpretations from the exegesis of interpretations. This is in order to avoid ascribing to Attis meanings and functions that are alien to him in the Phrygian period, projecting them back in time and valuing them as evidence of his mythical and ritual tradition.

²⁸⁴ For the form of assimilation of the deities mentioned in the hymns, useful elements of comparison are the *corpus* of the Orphic hymns (Quandt 1941) and also of the magical papyri (Preisendanz 1928-1931). On henotheism, cf. Festugière 1954; Versnel 1990; Auffarth 1993; on the magical papyri see Betz 1995.

²⁸⁵ Attis is called “father”, “corpse”, “god”, “unfruitful”, “harvested green ear of grain”, “the one to whom the almond tree gave birth”.

²⁸⁶ “Goatherd”, “flute-player”.

CHAPTER FOUR

BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND PHILOSOPHY: NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ATTIS MYTH AND OF HIS CULT

4.1. *The Naassenes: classical traditions and Gnosticism*

This is not the place to analyse the complex document left us by Hippolytus concerning the Gnostic sect of the Naassenes and our only explicit evidence for that sect. That document is a very important witness about the “learned” reinterpretation of Attis traditions in the Late Antiquity¹. This sect, which most probably flourished in the 2nd century CE, is distinct from other Gnostic groups in the importance it accorded to classical religious traditions received and reinterpreted according to its own doctrine.

At the end of his long dissertation, the Naassene author quotes the two hymns that I had already mentioned in the previous chapter, together with his own detailed commentary. In the course of his argument, he repeats precisely the various epithets attributed to Attis especially in the first hymn² and then reinterprets them within his own ideological system. In essence, the ideology of the Naassenes is based on a tripartite view of the universe: between the divine and material planes there is a being – the celestial Anthropos – who acts as intermediary between these two dimensions that otherwise are incompatible. The Attis of the hymn is identified as the celestial Anthropos and his epithets are used as evidence that all peoples, utterly unaware of what they are doing, worship him. On the other hand, only the Naassenes are able to grasp the deeper message that is concealed

¹ Hipp., *Ref.* V 6-11, also known as the “Naassene Sermon”. A systematic analysis of this document is provided in Lancellotti 2000, where the themes of this paragraph are thoroughly studied.

² In the first hymn it is said that Attis is called Adonis, Osiris, “celestial horn of the moon”, Adam(as), Corybas by various peoples, and Papas, “corpse” “god”, “unfruitful”, “goatherd”, “harvested green ear of grain”, “flute-player” by the Phrygians (Hipp., *Ref.* V 9, 8). In the second hymn Attis is called Pan, Bacchus and the “shepherd of white stars” (Hipp., *Ref.* V 9, 9).

behind the divine beings and the cultic manifestations to which they refer. As in other Gnostic systems defined as “triadic”, it is the Medio-Platonist pattern that provides the structure into which the real Gnostic ideological nucleus is inserted.

Accordingly, we should not make the mistake of confusing the religious message conveyed by the hymns with the message of the author of the Sermon, still less explain one by the other. For the Naassenes the hymns were material for research and especially for reinterpretation, just like the other sources that they used. Once the various epithets of the first hymn had been listed *verbatim*, they are commented on with the support of other sources, both “pagan” and from Scripture. Naturally the Naassenes knew, in their own way, the traditions contained in the verses, but in their commentary this knowledge is subordinate to their religious propositions. As a consequence, the traditions presented in the commentary are the result of research following a particular ideology, with the presupposition of proving that the divine intermediary principle is worshipped by various peoples under different names. The first hymn to Attis, with the survey of deities identified with him, was an excellent starting point for explaining that idea.

These preliminary considerations seem to be necessary to avoid the risk, as has happened in the past, of ascribing the Sermon to “phantom” followers of the cult of the Great Mother who would have composed a “pagan” document that only later incorporated a series of exegetical interpolations³. Another risk is to conclude that the Naassenes were more interested in Attis than in other mythical and ritual traditions that they cite. It is always important, therefore, to keep the ideological point of view of the composer of the hymns separate from the viewpoint of the Naassenes who comment on them.

Thus the hymns to Attis are only the source used by the Naassenes and do not reflect their doctrinal position. As happens with other deities mentioned in the hymns, Attis is also accepted to the extent that he is functionally suitable to represent the celestial Anthropos. The author of the Sermon shows that he is aware of the interpretation in “cosmic” terms of the character portrayed in the hymns, but considers it necessary to subject them to deeper exegesis in the search

³ Cf. Reitzenstein 1901 and 1904; Bousset 1901; Leisegang 1924. As for the theory that there are several strata in the Naassene document, cf. Lancellotti 2000, pp. 10-29.

for their “truer” meaning”. Accordingly, for the purposes of our research it will not be so important to examine the exegesis of the various epithets Attis is given in the hymns, as they are only a “device” for speculation that is completely independent of the terms that gave rise to it. More important are those passages where reference to Attis or to certain aspects of his cult is the object of a deeper reflection on the basis of which certain important doctrinal aspects take shape⁴.

For a correct understanding of the significance given to Attis and his set of myth and ritual by the author of the Sermon, and before analysing those passages, it is necessary first to make some remarks about the Naassene ideological system, in order to make the process of reinterpretation even clearer. As has been said, for the Naassenes, Attis and his tradition are in fact a “code” which they use to convey, with examples, certain significant features of their own religious message.

The fundamental principle for the ethical behaviour of the Naassenes is the deep and specular relationship that exists between the “perfect” and the divine intermediary principle who is said to be androgynous. The aim of the Naassenes is to attain the dimension of androgyny lost after the creation of Adam, which is possibly only through the cessation of sexual and procreative acts. Thus the ban on marriage and procreation is based on a protological event and is the *conditio sine qua non* for a return to the original state. But if the return to the origins is a return of divine androgyny, how then explain the equation – made continually in the document – between “perfect” and “male”? The apparent contradiction between “masculinisation” and “androgyny” is determined by the interweaving of the anthropological and theological themes. Earthly man is in fact a mixture of incompatible elements: matter, psychic aggregates and a pneumatic seed. Once the equivalence pneumatic seed = “inner man” has been established, the masculinity mentioned above seems to be disconnected from belonging to the two sexes in the earthly dimension and is instead identified with the divine element within human being.

In short, for the Naassenes renunciation of sexual activity is equivalent to masculinisation, in turn identified with an awareness that the inner Anthropos exists. The divine element of one’s being is what must rejoin the celestial Anthropos from which it comes.

⁴ For a thorough analysis of the Naassenes’ commentary on the hymns see Lancelotti 2000, pp. 245-284. Cf. also Borgeaud 1996, pp. 143-156.

Sexual union, condemned at the anthropological level, is instead necessary in the divine dimension: divine androgyny is not barren. In fact, every level of reality is produced and nourished by the celestial Anthropos with the substance that suits it and allows harmonious development. Precisely because of this life-giving function that is peculiar to him, he is formless⁵ but endowed with three natures. The three natures are noetic, psychic and ilic, through which he nourished reality that in turn is subdivided into three kinds, angelic, psychic and choic⁶. Thus the image of the erect phallus⁷ expresses the creative power of the divine Anthropos: the life-giving process is conceived as a cosmic embrace strengthened by nature's "desire" to possess a soul⁸.

On the anthropological level, the creation of material man determines the insertion of the divine seed into the material dimension. For this weakening of the pneumatic level the Naassenes use a sexual metaphor: it is like an ἀπόρροια, an illicit seminal emission weakening the male dimension of the Anthropos. The Saviour's intervention causes a "perfection" of the human being who "becomes male". "Becoming male" is envisaged as leaving corporality and its associated sexual urges, with the "male part" of an individual returning to the divine world. In this way the celestial Anthropos regains his dimension of perfect androgyny.

This myth is analogous to, but diametrically the opposite of, the more widespread Gnostic myth in which there is a defection from the divine of its female part, considered as weaker (cf. Barbelo, Sophia, etc.). In this case the maternal (female) element is located firmly in the *pleroma*⁹ while the male element collapses. This would explain why the Naassenes were interested in the myth and ritual connected with the Great Mother and her *paredros*, Attis, which they considered as symbolising the stable and flawed elements respectively in the divine dimension.

In the light of these remarks we can now analyse two passages that are particularly important for explaining the attitude of the Naassenes towards the system of values expressed by the myth and ritual connected with Attis that they knew.

⁵ Cf. Hipp., *Ref.* V 7, 18; 7, 23; 7, 25; 7, 33; 8, 13-15; 8, 21; 8, 40.

⁶ Hipp., *Ref.* V 6, 7.

⁷ Cf. Hipp., *Ref.* V 7, 27-29.

⁸ Cf. Hipp., *Ref.* V 7, 10; 8, 4.

⁹ That is, in the "fullness" of the divine world.

The first passage (Hipp. *Ref.* V 7, 11ff.) concerns the division of the universe into three as exemplified by the Naassenes by reference to certain characters from classical mythology. The soul, personified by Adonis, is desired by Aphrodite, who to the Naassenes represents *genesis*, the material world subject to the regime of procreation. But Adonis is also loved by Persephone and so the soul turns from generation to death, the other face of the earthly world in which, given the anti-cosmic context, these two moments coincide. With the mention of Endymion and Selene, the desire to possess a soul is also ascribed to heavenly beings. The whole intra-cosmic world, then, is subject to the law of *γένεσις – φθορά* and sexual drive (*ἐπιθυμία*) from which not even celestial creatures are exempt. Immediately afterwards Hippolytus adds that if “the Mother of the gods castrates Attis while even retaining him as an object of longing, the blessed nature (...) of the transcendent and eternal realms, recalls to itself the masculine power of the soul”¹⁰. The return of the soul’s masculine element to the heavenly dimension is conceived as a “new creation”. It is the Pauline *καὶνὸς ἄνθρωπος*, neither male nor female but *male-female* (*ἀρσενόθελος*).

Thus the relationship Great Mother-Attis, and especially the episode of his castration appear as the symbol of the return to the pleromatic world of the divine element imprisoned in man that, as we have seen, is represented by the image of sperm. When Attis is “reconciled” with the Great Mother, the weakened divine level recovers from an “aberrant” loss of noetic essence.

The Naassenes have certainly produced their own original reinterpretation of the myth about the castration of Attis. In particular, it is based not so much on the cosmic characteristics of Attis as on the meaning of his emasculation – understood as a negation of generation – as an element of mediation between the followers and the Great Mother, a mediation that, as we have seen, both through the Galli and later through the *taurobolium*, is a significant moment in ritual practice in respect of the cult of the Great Mother and of Attis in the imperial period.

The passage about the “Phrygian mysteries” is confirmation that this mediation specifically was the fulcrum of interest for the Naassenes. In *Ref.* V 9, 10ff., in fact, Hippolytus says that the

¹⁰ Transl. R.S. Birdsall, in Birdsall 1984, p. 301.

Naassenes attend the mysteries of the Great Mother, believing that through the δρώμενα they can contemplate the whole mystery. Hippolytus then explains what the rites are that fired their interest: "For these (i.e. the Naassenes) have nothing more than the δρώμενα (what are performed) there, but they are not emasculated; they only do the work of the emasculated (...). Like the emasculated they proclaim their abstention from intercourse with women. All other activities (...) they perform like the emasculated"¹¹.

It is clear that the reference here is not to the common faithful of the cult of the Great Mother in general, but to that very special category of followers, the Galli, whose initiation, as we have seen, their contemporaries often perceived in terms of the *mysteria*.

This category of followers was therefore considered by the Naassenes to some extent as a "pattern" for their own way of behaving. Their interest in the Galli seems to be focused on castration and its ideological background. The most obvious fact about the personality of the Galli was their belonging to a community that on the one hand portrayed itself as composed only of "men"¹² and on the other seemed to prescind from physical reality to attain a superior status that went beyond the division of the sexes, appearing as the prototype of "non-generation". This paradox is the same as the one in which the Naassenes found themselves living, all made "male" by perfection, but at the same time belonging to a *tertius sexus* that surpasses, by denial, every sexual difference.

The question remains as to the nature of the "mysteries" of the Great Mother in which the Naassenes had the possibility of participating. Very probably they were the public ceremonies of March that celebrated what happened to Attis.

In their reinterpretation of the mythical and ritual traditions about Attis, the Naassenes concentrated their attention on two aspects. On the one hand they praise those cosmic qualities of Attis that make him particularly suitable to represent the divine intermediary principle in his positive and necessary function of giving life to the cosmos. On the other hand, they rework the episode of his emasculation that becomes a symbol, for these Gnostics, of the divine element, unlawfully imprisoned in the human body, returning to its original home, the *pleroma*. It is clear, then, that it is not Attis who "characterises" the Naassene

¹¹ Hipp., *Ref.* V 9, 10-11.

¹² It cannot be denied that only men can emasculate themselves.

divine intermediary principle. Instead, it is the divine intermediary principle that acts as a catalyst which includes certain considerably reworked characteristics of Attis.

4.2. *The philosophical “paganism” of the Emperor Julian*

At present all scholars agree that there are undoubtedly similarities between the interpretation by the Naassenes of the mythical and ritual traditions about the cult of Attis and the interpretation proposed by the Emperor Julian in the *V Oration, To the Mother of the gods* (362 CE)¹³. In modern studies, however, there is a tendency to put particular emphasis on the differences between these documents. This attitude is justified in part by the refusal of a previous line of interpretation that, based on the hypothesis of an earlier pagan document on which the Naassenes “worked”, held that there was an “original” model on which both the Naassenes and Julian drew¹⁴. Once the existence of such a document is denied, and the legitimate “paternity” of the whole Sermon is ascribed to the Naassenes¹⁵, in my opinion, the very imperative question arises of verifying whether there was any dependence between the document recorded by Hippolytus and the oration of Julian. It is correct to refer to a common Platonic background to explain the evident speculative similarities (but accepting the slightly different ideological frame of reference)¹⁶. However, it is necessary to take a step further and to examine thoroughly the similarities between the two texts and how they are related to each other. It is unnecessary to add that the chronology implies that Julian knew the Naassene document and not the other way round.

Some progress in the study of possible connections between the “Naassenes Sermon” and the *V Oration* has been made by Turcan in a recent publication¹⁷. In it he maintains the possibility that the Emperor Julian came into contact with Naassene exegesis of the Attis myth at the time of his education “au château de *Macellum*” where “le futur

¹³ Cf. e.g. Bouffartigue 1992, pp. 375-379; Sfameni Gasparro 1981; Borgeaud 1996, pp. 146-156.

¹⁴ Cf. e. g. Wendland 1972 (1912), pp. 177-180.

¹⁵ Cf. Nock 1929; Schenke 1962; Simonetti 1970; Sfameni Gasparro 1981; Lancellotti 2000.

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. Sfameni Gasparro 1981; Borgeaud 1996, pp. 155-156.

¹⁷ Turcan 1996a.

César dévorait la bibliothèque de Georges, alors prêtre chargé de son ‘institution’ chrétienne”¹⁸. In the period of his exile in Cappadocia, at Macellum, as Julian relates in a letter to Ecdicius, he borrowed some books from Georgios, the Aryan bishop of Alexandria, that dealt with the philosophy, rhetoric and doctrine of the Galileans¹⁹.

This hypothesis has some very interesting implications: the *V Oration* has in fact often been used as evidence for the existence of pagan exegesis of the myth and cult of Attis – like the exegesis found in the Naassenes Sermon – that would lie concealed during the first centuries of the Christian era to emerge in Neo-Platonist speculations of the 4th and 5th centuries²⁰. If one takes into account the possibility that Julian knew the Gnostic material in the *Refutatio* of Hippolytus, particularly on the Naassenes, obviously the *V Oration* could no longer be used as proof for that.

This is of the greatest interest for this study, the aim of which is to examine the processes of reelaboration of the oldest mythical and ritual traditions about Attis, distinguishing as far as possible the different regions and periods in question.

After an outline of the rich description of influences that contributed to the formation of Julian’s thought, both those to which the emperor explicitly refers and those that operate instead at the level of the unconscious – the fruit of remembered readings or philosophical discussions – Turcan concludes that “il suffisait de reconnaître l’âme cosmique du *Timée* et la quintessence d’Aristote dans la “fleur du feu” divin généreusement diffusée, mais providentiellement maîtrisée, pour ne plus s’offusquer d’une éviration mythique. Mais pour faire la théorie avec l’ardeur qui anime le *Discours sur la Mère des dieux*, il fallait aussi comprendre que l’âme individuelle est solidaire de l’âme du monde, qu’elles sont en quelque manière consubstantielles et que les sorts se confondent ou sont tout au moins parallèles. C’était au fond déjà l’idée des Naasséniens”²¹.

In this book I would like to go further and more radically along the line set out by Turcan conjecturing that the work of Julian is in some sense a “pagan” re-reading of the same Sermon. Certainly not systematic exegesis of the document but instead a recovery in philosoph-

¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 395.

¹⁹ Letter 107 Bidez-Cumont (republished in Bidez, I/2, pp. 185-186), cf. Festugière 1959, pp. 63-89, particularly pp. 67-68.

²⁰ Cf. *supra* n. 14.

²¹ Turcan 1996a, p. 403.

ical terms of a speculation that the Naassenes had already started on the person of Attis but which had gone in a Christian-Gnostic direction. However, it has been emphasised how, beyond Julian's personal devotion to the Great Mother, the *V Oration* must be set within a wider project. This was to propose a "pagan" State religion to be set against rampant Christianity, a religion that on the one hand, had to recover the "original" traits of the oldest beliefs and on the other, recast these beliefs in allegorical terms based on Neo-Platonic doctrines²².

The *V Oration* is probably the result of Julian's own work on an exegesis that already existed, Naassene exegesis in fact, possibly not deliberately plagiarised but probably "retrieved" unconsciously from the baggage of his previous reading. Julian's aim of presenting a purely "traditional" religion may have determined the complete elimination of Gnostic-Christian references that are particularly evident in the Naassene document in connection with soteriology. On the other hand, the fact that Julian's exegesis is in some sense an alternative to Naassene exegesis could account for the inconsistencies and uncertain arguments of his speculations²³.

In what follows I first analyse some passages of Julian's oration, then I consider some remarks by Cosi in his study about *V Oration*²⁴. Finally, I set out my own interpretative hypothesis.

After reporting the traditions about the introduction of the cult of the Great Mother to Athens and Rome, Julian identifies Attis with "the substance of generative and creative Mind which engenders all things down to the lowest plane of matter, and comprehends in itself all the concepts and causes of the forms that are embodied in matter"²⁵. Thus the *V Oration* provides a cosmological or rather cosmosophical²⁶ picture based on the Neo-Platonic doctrine of the degradation of levels from the world of the intellect up to the sensible world. The nature of Attis is that of the "third creator, who contains in himself the separate concepts of the forms that are embodied in matter and also the connected chain of causes, I mean that the nature

²² Cf. Cosi 1986, pp. 103-106. On the importance of worship of the Great Mother in individual devotion and in the religious propaganda of Julian cf. Marco Simón 1999 (with previous bibliography).

²³ Cf. Cosi 1986, p. 106 and p. 111.

²⁴ Cosi 1986.

²⁵ Jul., *V or.* 161c, transl. by W. Cave Wright, in Cave Wright 1953, I, p. 451.

²⁶ Cf. Cosi 1986, p. 107.

which is last in order, and through its superabundance of generative power descends even unto our earth through the upper region from the stars”²⁷. Attis is “the cause which descends even unto matter”²⁸. This generative principle, according to the wish of the Mother of the gods, is allowed to act up to the furthest edge of the Milky Way. But Attis goes beyond the limits and reaches “even to the lowest region”²⁹, an event that in myth is represented by his union with the nymph, “the dampness of matter”³⁰. The Mother of the gods who, together with father Zeus “creates all things that are”, is “in control of every form of life, and the cause of all generation”³¹. According to Julian’s exegesis, the “passionless love”³² for Attis of the Mother of the gods mentioned in the myth means that “(...) not only the forms embodied in matter but to a still greater degree the causes of those forms, voluntarily serve her and obey her will”³³. She commands Attis “to beget offspring rather in the intelligible region”³⁴. Through castration the Mother of the gods slows down Attis who is rushing towards the infinite: “(...) now was generation confined within definite forms checked by creative Providence. And this would not have happened without the so-called madness of Attis, which overstepped and transgressed due measure, and thereby made him become weak so that he had no control over himself. And it is not surprising that this should come to pass, when we have to do with the cause that ranks lowest among the gods”³⁵. After mutilation, Attis is called back to the Mother of the gods. To prove the correctness of his exegesis, Julian adds that in the rite the tree is cut “directly mighty Helios touches the cycle of the equinox, where the bounds are most clearly defined. (For the even is bounded, but the uneven is without bounds, and there is no way through or out of it)”³⁶.

It has been emphasised how within the cosmology presented by

²⁷ Jul., *V or.* 161d, transl. by W. Cave Wright, in Cave Wright 1953, I, p. 451.

²⁸ Jul., *V or.* 165b, *id.*, p. 461.

²⁹ Jul., *V or.* 165c, *id.*, p. 463.

³⁰ Jul., *V or.* 165c, *ibid.* “This Gallus, the intellectual god, the connecting link between forms embodied in matter beneath the region of the moon, is united with the cause that is set over matter, but not in the sense that one sex is united with another, but like an element that is gathered to itself”, Jul., *V or.* 165d, *ibid.*

³¹ Jul., *V or.* 166a, p. 465.

³² Jul., *V or.* 166b, *ibid.*

³³ Jul., *V or.* 166b, *ibid.*

³⁴ Jul., *V or.* 166c, *ibid.*

³⁵ Jul., *V or.* 167c-d, *id.*, p. 469.

³⁶ Jul., *V or.* 168d, *id.*, p. 471.

Julian there prevails a certain ambiguity from the fact that the creative action of Attis, both positive and necessary, implies also an inherent “risk” in the mixing of two levels, the divine and the material, that are ontologically distinct³⁷. Commenting on the passage from Julian, Così identifies in the “excessive fecundity” characteristic of that principle the “previous sin” (“colpa precedente”), that is an unforeseen circumstance that causes Attis to be unrestrained within the limits allowed him³⁸. But the element upsetting the balance is to be found not so much in the generative power itself as in the weight of passion with which Attis performs that action. The correct love is that of the Mother of the gods, an ἔρως ἀπαθής that promotes the “creative and generative cause”³⁹. The Mother of the gods does not forbid Attis to generate in the material world, even if she commands him to act *preferably* at the intelligible level. The correct creation occurs if Attis is turned towards her and is not “dragged down or allured into generation”⁴⁰. It is a creation that does not involve passion, as is evident from the statement that “the Mother of the gods exhorted Attis not to leave her or to love another”⁴¹. Emasculation, which is the opposite of the sexual act, here clearly considered the symbol of the passionate and “material” involvement of the divine principle in the sensible world, thus represents the moment of return, of regaining equilibrium that risked being irretrievably lost.

According to Così, after Attis returned to her, Cybele expressed her wish that his generative power should never again be used at the material level but only at the intelligible level⁴². This interpretation seems to contradict what Julian himself says: “(...) forever is Attis the servant and the charioteer of the Mother; forever he yearns passionately towards generation; and forever he cuts short his unlimited course through the cause whose limits are fixed, even the cause of the forms”⁴³. This is not a linear temporal view, indicated by *initial situa-*

³⁷ Cf. Sfameni Gasparro 1981, p. 403.

³⁸ Così 1986, p. 108.

³⁹ Jul., *Vor.* 166c, transl. by W. Cave Wright, in Cave Wright 1953, I, p. 465.

⁴⁰ Jul., *Vor.* 166 c-d, *ibid.*

⁴¹ Jul., *Vor.* 167a-b, *id.*, p. 467.

⁴² Così writes: “la Madre Cibele, che già prima aveva inutilmente cercato di recuperarlo al mondo divino, lo richiama infine, così “purificato”, al livello superiore da cui era decaduto, esprimendo l’auspicio che la sua forza generatrice e feconda non si rivolga più alla *genesis* del livello materiale, ma si occupi di generare (...) nel livello intelligibile”, Così 1986, p. 108.

⁴³ Jul., *Vor.* 171c-d, transl. by W. Cave Wright, in Cave Wright 1953, I, p. 479.

tion – fall – salvation, since what is presented in the myth as a story is considered in the exegesis of Julian as a necessary and continual process that recurs cyclically: it is the actual image of reality unfolding. As for the lack of clarity that would be inherent in the statement that the fall of Attis is not against the will of the Mother of the gods, “anche se la si dice contraria”⁴⁴, it will no longer appear as such if one takes into account that in Julian’s work, mythical narrative, “popular” exegesis and philosophical interpretation continually intersect. In the “Phrygian” version of the myth, Cybele’s intervention is intended to prevent the wedding of Attis, but in the “vulgar” interpretation, it is understood as a consequence of the aversion the Mother of the gods has for the same event. Julian, instead, stresses that this intervention, beyond what it might appear to be, is in fact desired at the divine level.

If we now compare the Naassenes document with Julian’s *V Oration* it is immediately apparent that the latter is modulated around an ideological pattern that is very different from the one in the former, although it shares its positive aspect of the “moulding” process of the divine mediator element on matter. For the Naassenes its descent becomes negative at the anthropological level, for Julian it must be limited, for both the mutilation of Attis symbolises a “conversion”, understood as a movement in reverse, from below to above. But whereas for the Naassenes this metaphor is used to represent the soteriological process, for Julian it symbolises instead the cyclical eternal return of the creator principle upwards: Attis will always fall downwards and Attis will always be mutilated, because the process of the intermediary being conforming to reality is continuous. As Turcan has correctly noted, common to both types of exegesis is the connection between the *anima mundi* and the individual soul, but in Naassene interpretation, in perfect agreement with Gnostic ideology, the presence in man of the soul⁴⁵ is considered the result of a “mistake”: the aim of soteriology is specifically to restore to the divine level what has been unjustifiably lost.

As for Julian, at least explicitly, no consubstantiality can be found between the *anima mundi* and the individual soul, the former appearing rather as the model to which the latter should conform. Accord-

⁴⁴ Cf. Cosi 1986, p. 107, n. 14.

⁴⁵ Here the noetic, divine element is meant, which is kept in the material and sensible body.

ing to the Naassenes, the intermediary being is made up of three natures – noetic, psychic and ilic – and each of them can act exclusively at its own level, it is precisely that differentiated action which is at the basis of their cosmology. In the demiurgic principle of Julian there is no ontological distinction. Instead it is the level of action (intelligible, material) at which it moves that determines the various creative results. Summarising, for the Naassenes the process of giving life to reality is differentiated and the imbalance of the system is caused by the illicit admission of the noetic element (the soul) into the material level (the material and sensible body). Castration symbolises the return of the divine element imprisoned in the human body to the noetic level. For Julian also the life-giving process of the cosmos is allowed, but castration does not serve to restore balance to an altered system but springs instead from the need to limit and regulate the very generative process. Castration is precisely the mark of that limit and inaugurates, in a sequence that is otherwise linear and infinite, the conversion, the return. However, this return is not to be understood soteriologically, as had the Naassenes, but cosmologically in that it determines the correct alternation that is in fact the very rhythm of existence. For both, the mutilation serves to control the fertilising force specific to the intermediary element. For the Naassenes it is a question of blocking an “anomalous” generation (the divine that fertilises matter), inaugurating a “new” time in which divine will exclusively fertilise divine. For Julian generation is “anomalous” if it takes place through a sexual urge, that is, allowing itself to be governed not by the intelligible level (Mother of the gods) but by the material level (the nymph), the intermediary principle must give life to matter but without allowing itself to be involved in the rhythms of γένεσις – φθορά that are proper to it, which imply a loss of power and removal from the hyper-uranian world.

If for the Naassenes the Attis episode represents the fall and recovery of the divine element in the material body in a linear perspective, Julian instead uses it as a symbol of the continuous, cyclical process of the creation of reality.

In the conclusions of his study, Cosi accepts as the particular distinctive trait between the ideology of the *V Oration* and of the Sermon the fact that in the former the cosmos is not intrinsically negative and generative activity is necessary for its existence⁴⁶. As I hope to have

⁴⁶ Cosi 1986, p. 112.

shown in my book on the Naassenes⁴⁷, the cosmology expressed in the Sermon is also basically positive, in spite of the insertion, at the level of matter, of a “second creator”, Esaldaios, who is considered the intelligible principle of matter itself, its regulator and governor through the regime of *genesis*. The life-giving and therefore *sui generis* “generating” action of the Anthropos complements the action of Esaldaios and allows the standard unfolding of reality. It is only when it penetrates a material creature (man) that the intermediary principle remains involved in a generation that is realised under the sign of sexuality and procreation.

It is appropriate to emphasise yet again that generative activity is negated only when it involves different ontological levels, in fact, the truly negative element in Julian’s Oration is the fact that the faithful is involved in *genesis*, with the result that the regime of fall is protracted⁴⁸. This statement also fits Naassene anthropology perfectly, even if it must be stressed that, in the Naassene Sermon, the consubstantiality asserted between man’s soul and the Anthropos implies a different relationship between anthropology/soteriology and cosmology.

Also, the connection that Cosi proposes between protology and anthropology in the *V Oration*⁴⁹, may be disputed. Indeed, he mentions an original state of perfection that must be recovered through an attitude of abstention. However, the “original situation” is presented as such only in the myth used by Julian, whereas in his exegesis it is interpreted as part of a cyclical process that takes place eternally. Moreover, as Cosi himself stresses, from the anthropological point of view, Julian never explicitly identifies Attis with the human soul of which he is a prototype. Instead, a parallel is set up between what happens to Attis-*anima mundi* and what happens to men: using the more important passages of the Metroac ritual – the cutting down the tree, the *Hilaria* – Julian presents the return journey of human souls that also have to escape “from the limitlessness and generation and inward storm”⁵⁰, that is, from the material kingdom. Even so, in

⁴⁷ Cf. Lancellotti 2000.

⁴⁸ Cosi 1986, p. 112.

⁴⁹ Cf. *id.*, p. 111, where the author speaks of a connection “tra la crisi dell’entità divina, causata da una propensione connaturata verso la sessualità e la generazione, e l’atteggiamento astensionistico che tende a restaurare la perfezione della situazione originaria”.

⁵⁰ Jul., *V or.* 169d transl. by W. Cave Wright, in Cave Wright 1953, I, pp. 474-475; in this connection, cf. also Sallust, *De diis et mundo* IV.

Julian a specific reference is lacking that would allow us to understand the cause that had made souls fall downwards.

Unlike in the system of the Naassenes, human souls, although presumably belonging originally to the intelligible level, are not described as particles of the divine intermediary principle imprisoned in matter, their fall is not considered a “weakening” of the upper level that implies a divine intervention in terms of soteriology. It is man who, by appropriate behaviour, symbolised by the prohibitions and regulations of Metroac practice, may aspire to return back on high, but the divine does not move to save him, as happens in the case of the Naassenes. This is because in the *Oration* the anthropological problem remains a “human” problem, though for the Naassenes and more generally for Gnosticism, it is first and foremost a “divine” problem. Thus, whereas in the *Oration* human events seem to be linked to perpetual cyclicality, for the Naassenes the purpose of abstinence from sex is to redress the “divine” imbalance brought about precisely by the birth of mankind.

Therefore the gap between the two documents lies not so much in cosmology as in anthropology and soteriology.

The comparative analysis has shown both the similarities and the fundamental differences between the two systems analysed. At this point it is legitimate to wonder whether, in the light of what has emerged, it is possible to propose that Julian depended on the “Sermon”. Several elements argue in favour of the fact that probably Julian was stimulated to perform an exegesis of the Platonic kind on the Attis myth specifically by the Naassene document, using it as a starting point for his own reflections but reaching different conclusions. It is more difficult to determine whether this was due to the Emperor’s specific plan or whether instead it is a sort of unconscious legacy from his own youthful reading. However, I think that it is even more difficult to demonstrate the absolute autonomy of the two speculations due possibly to an independent reinterpretation of the mythical and ritual traditions about Attis.

It is certain that if Julian had intended to present as an alternative to a Platonic but “Christianised” exegesis of the Attis myth, as in the Naassene document, an authentically “pagan” Platonic exegesis, the difference could only have been based essentially on anthropology and soteriology. For the Naassenes the salvation of an individual undergoes the saving intervention of the *soter* who descends into the world to bring *gnosis*. Its consequence is the activation of an absten-

tionist ethic and a sacramental praxis – characterised by baptism and anointing – that have their most important parallels not in the ritual of Attis but in Syrian Jewish Christianity, strongly coloured by encratic and/or Gnostic elements. Metroac rituality is only a term of comparison, the abstentionist behaviour advocated by it becomes understandable and therefore acceptable only if reinterpreted in the light of Naassene doctrines. For Julian, instead, whose reference points, at least at the programmatic level, are “pagan” traditions, it is precisely the Metroac rituality that acts as a paradigm for his own soteriological vision, to be understood in the sense of the human element sharing in the divine plan⁵¹. But it is a declaration of principle because then, in practice, for Julian exactly as for the Naassenes, the idea is operative that the Metroac ritual also, as practised at the “popular” level, does not get to the core of truth⁵². Like the Naassenes, Julian also rejects physical mutilation⁵³, sublimating it in an ideal of chastity and continence. Therefore, mere participation in ritual is not enough. That ritual has to be re-read, reinterpreted, to understand its deeper meaning, which goes beyond actions, to penetrate the sense.

In conclusion, if Julian’s exegesis is set within the wider plan of recovering and reinterpreting paganism, it will not seem too strange that he notes the need to “regain possession” of the myth and ritual of Attis and supply its “correct” reading – philosophical, yes, but strictly along the lines of “pagan” tradition – a myth and a rite that by the Naassenes themselves were subjected to an exegesis that ultimately inserted them within a Christian ideology. What Julian proposes is a typically “pagan” Attis, directed therefore to represent, by coagulating them in his own person, the last glimmers of a religious ideology already in decline.

This lengthy digression on the Naassene ideological system and on the system presented in the *V Oration* allows important facts to be gained about the “previous” history of Attis, even if of course viewed retrospectively and so requiring decoding. But analysis of these two documents is basic also for understanding their contribution to the construction of that “philosophical Attis” who was to have such success in the history of studies. Unfortunately, though, the “philosophi-

⁵¹ Jul., *V or.* 169.

⁵² The knowledge trasmitted by *Oration* is reserved to only a few, cf. Jul., *V or.* 170a-c.

⁵³ Jul., *V or.* 174c.

cal Attis” was ultimately to become the universal key for reading the mythical and ritual traditions about Attis, irrespective of the times and places in which they appeared.

4.3. *Philosophical and Christian allegorical interpretations*

The speculations of the Naassenes and of Julian are not isolated documents in the processes of revisionist reading that in learned cultural and religious circles were carried out on the complex of mythical and ritual traditions about Attis. This complex of religious traditions, in fact, appeared particularly functional both for the relaunch of paganism, by the philosophers, and for its critique, promoted by Christian apologists. The interesting aspect is that, although from the ideological viewpoint they presented antithetical perspectives, the two positions were not exempt from contaminating each other and developing in parallel even if in different directions. In particular, here can be noted the results of that process of making Attis into a cosmic figure that, from the 2nd cent. CE, as we have seen, makes him into a divine being with cosmic and pantocratic prerogatives. This interpretation, also evident in “popular” images, nourishes and is nourished by that religious phenomenon currently defined as “solar theology”⁵⁴. Arnobius⁵⁵, Firmicus Maternus⁵⁶ and Julian⁵⁷; the author of *Carmen contra paganos*⁵⁸; Macrobius⁵⁹, Martianus Capella⁶⁰ and Proclus⁶¹ are

⁵⁴ The bibliography on the theme of “solar theology” in Late Antiquity is enormous. See, for example, Cumont 1913; Seyrig 1971 and 1973; Smith M. 1982; Stähli 1985; Halsberghe 1972 and 1984; Tubach 1986; Fauth 1995; Gordon 1997. As for the relationship Attis/Sun, according to a recent study by Fol (Fol 1997) on the Great Mother-Son partnership in the rituals and the cults of Orphic oral tradition, the Great Mother’s Son would have been identified with Sabazius in the Greek and Roman world. It is possible, then, that an identification between Sabazius/Dionysus and Attis had taken place later, where the latter assumed both the status of “son” and the solar character of the former.

⁵⁵ Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 42.

⁵⁶ Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. relig.* VIII 1-3. According to Pépin, an influence of Porphyry should be recognised here (Pépin 1982, pp. 260-261).

⁵⁷ Cf., besides the *V Oratio*, also the *Hymn to the sun (IV Oratio)*. In ascribing a demiurgic activity to the “sensible sun”, he would be dependent on Iamblichus, cf. Smith R. 1995, pp. 144-145 and n. 23.

⁵⁸ Cod. Paris. 8084, ff. 156a-158b, *Carm. contr. pagan.* v. 109. On the *carmen* and its religious and political settings cf. Mazzarino 1974, pp. 339-465.

⁵⁹ Macr., *Sat.*, I 21, 9.

⁶⁰ Mart. Cap., *De nupt. Phil. et Merc.* II v. 192 (ed. Lenoz 1975, p. 162).

⁶¹ Procl., *Eis Helion.* vv. 24-26 (Abel, p. 277).

connected with it. These cosmological speculations are also to be associated with evidence from iconography, such as the famous *lanx* of Parabiago⁶² and the lesser known silver amphora of Porto Baratti⁶³.

The emphasis given to the lunar aspects of Attis must also be placed within this process of astralisation⁶⁴: Damascius⁶⁵, who comments on the verses of the Orphic hymn-proem in which, among many other deities, the Mother of the gods is invoked, together with Attis and Men, maintains that the gods were put in charge of the upper regions according to a hierarchical order and Attis is in the lunar region. The identification of Attis as Men is also mentioned in the two hymns on which the Naassenes commented⁶⁶ and in some (late) epigraphs⁶⁷.

Another type of reflection on Attis that runs parallel with cosmic and solar interpretations is the “physical” one, that makes him (and other characters) symbolic representations of natural elements. According to the relevant documentation that has reached us, it must go back to Porphyry⁶⁸ and, in the version recorded by Eusebius⁶⁹, makes him the *symbolon* of the flower that falls before producing fruit, whereas the emasculation is a figure of those fruits that never reach completion. To this interpretation by Porphyry is also connected that by Augustine⁷⁰, who states that the philosopher connected spring flowers with Attis. Emasculation would represent the flower that falls *ante fructum*. Augustine stresses that it is not Attis who is the true object of the association but his *virilia*. This comparison seems very forced to him: mutilation does not happen by a natural process but through physical violence and also unlike spring flowers, it remains sterile.

If we compare the information in Augustine with what is in Eusebius, we notice that very probably the sequence *flower that must fall* >

⁶² Cf. Levi 1935; Albizzati 1937; Vermaseren 1966, pp. 27-29; Sfameni Gasparro 1981, p. 389; Musso 1983.

⁶³ Cf. Arias 1986. I am grateful to Biagio Virgilio for drawing my attention to this find.

⁶⁴ Cf. Turcan 1996a, p. 401.

⁶⁵ Dam., *De princ.* 352, fr. 201 Kern, p. 223.

⁶⁶ Attis is called the “celestial horn of the moon”.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Sanctus Menotyranus* *CIL* VI, 501; *Menotyranus*: *CIL* VI, 500, 501, 508, 511, 512, *IGSI* 913; *Menotyranus inuictus*: *CIL* VI, 499 (in Hepding 1903, pp. 208-109). A Phrygian cap, surmounted by a crescent and a star between two torches, is portrayed on a cippus from the Isola Sacra (Floriani Squarciapino 1962, p. 10, n.2 [Pl. IV]).

⁶⁸ Fr. 358F and Fr. ?358aF Smith, pp. 417-420.

⁶⁹ Eus., *PE* III 11, 12; 15; 17.

⁷⁰ Aug., *De civ. dei* VII 25.

fruit that will be born is an interpretation that Augustine imposes on Porphyry's interpretation. In Eusebius, in fact, what is emphasised is precisely the sterility of the mutilation that is compared with fruit that does not germinate.

Julian also provides evidence that Porphyry read the myth and ritual of Attis allegorically, although, as he himself stresses, he does not know its content⁷¹. Così has tried to show that this "ignorance", as declared by Julian, does not match the facts since it is very likely that he did know Porphyry's interpretation. According to Così, an important feature associates the exegesis of both, although for other verses they differ considerably. According to his interpretation, both Porphyry and Julian link Attis and his castration with the theme of generation as expressed through the symbolism of fructification, even if Julian transfers it to the cosmological and theological plane⁷².

As for myself, I consider that since the symbolism of castration, understood as the negation of generation, seems to be a fundamental element in the character of Attis and in the ideological universe connected with him at least from a certain period, the fact that both speculations start from the problem of procreation/sterility does not necessarily imply a connection between them.

The theme of castration is used, depending on period and interest, as a metaphor to express different realities and ideologies, even if always based on the concept that castration is equivalent above all to *non-generation*. By connecting Attis and emasculation with flowers and fruits that do not bear fruit, Porphyry is simply adopting and developing the basic characteristic of the "Phrygian" version concerning emasculation as the foundation of non-fertility. The floral reference could perhaps have been taken from mythical and ritual tradition. In fact, in the version given by Arnobius there is an explicit reference to violets that grow from the blood of Attis and his wife and these flowers are also present in the ritual of the funerary lamentations in March⁷³. But both in the documentation on the myth and ritual of Attis and in Porphyrian speculation there is a complete absence of any reference to a seasonal cycle of which Attis himself is the image⁷⁴.

⁷¹ Jul., *Vor.* 161c.

⁷² Così 1986, pp. 97-98.

⁷³ Arn., *Adv. nat.* V 7.

⁷⁴ According to Turcan (Turcan 1996a, p. 391) Porphyrian exegesis should be placed between that of Messala and that of Julian, in the line Attis/flower/heaven.

The presence of the violet as the metamorphosed blood of Attis must be connected with the mythical foundation of pre-agricultural vegetation⁷⁵ and the same can be said of the “harvested green ear of grain”, as Attis is called, among other epithets, in the first hymn recorded by the Naassenes⁷⁶. In this case also they are unproductive, sterile vegetal elements. The symbolism, in the case of the green ear of grain, is particularly transparent: the very emblem of agriculture, the ripe spike full of seeds, is replaced by a similar but contrasting image: the same spike has been harvested while still green. It is not only a metaphor of unripeness, but the very negation of productive fertility. In the rite the violets are closely connected with the funereal aspect of the Attis ceremonies, leaving no room, even here, for vegetal interpretations related to the vegetal cycle. The pine itself, which has such importance in the ritual due to its quality of an evergreen, refers rather to the permanence of a situation, and in the Roman world it is traditionally linked with the dead.

At all events, care must always be taken to keep separate the levels of cult and of reinterpretation, that is, the use of these traditions by exegetes in a late period. As for Eusebius and Augustine in particular, it should be remembered that theirs is an “exegesis of exegesis”, which makes it especially risky to adopt their interpretations as direct evidence for the beliefs underlying the cult of Attis in current practice. In any case, in my opinion, it must be emphasised that given the present state of our knowledge and due to the continual process of modification that the very character of Attis has undergone in time and space, it is not possible to specify an “orthodoxy” in respect of which the various attempts at exegesis were closer or further away. Even if certain basic lines can be traced that remain through the various modifications, the success of Attis is probably due to his “malleability”, that is, his capacity to respond to the demands that vary with differing contexts.

A third line of interpretation that emerges in Late Antiquity, that is also interwoven and often inextricably connected with theological-cosmic-solar and physical-naturalistic exegesis, presents Attis in association with or as identified with other characters. This line of interpretation is of special importance because it represents the presupposition, often not duly taken into consideration, for constructing the

⁷⁵ Cf. ch. 3.3.

⁷⁶ Hipp., *Ref.* V 9, 8.

Frazerian pattern of the dying god (cf. *infra*).

Although widely attested in the imperial period, the association of Attis with Dionysus seems to be much more difficult to prove for earlier periods⁷⁷. In the earliest documentation, while it is possible to see the Metroac cult coming close to the cult of Dionysus under the sign of the *furor*⁷⁸, it is much more difficult to point to a specific link between Attis and Dionysus and their identification is even more difficult. Earlier, I have quoted the passage from Demosthenes (*De corona* 259-260) and the difficulty of its interpretation. Here I only note that it mentions the names of Attis and Sabazius in a “Dionysiac” cultic context⁷⁹.

Whatever the elements may have been that, either in Asia Minor or in Greece, were at the basis of the connection between Attis and Dionysus, it should be remembered that, in later sources in Greek, no trace is to be found of any such connection except at a much later date. On the other hand, according to Picard, later identifications between Attis and Dionysus⁸⁰ were to some extent influenced by representations in the Hellenistic period of both gods as *putti*⁸¹.

Instead, all the associations of Attis with various so-called “dying” gods are from the late period. The association between Attis, Diony-

⁷⁷ Several historico-religious and epigraphic arguments prevent us from taking into account the proposal of G. Garbini (Garbini 1985 and 1991, p. 225), who considers an *ostrakon* from Tharros (Sardinia) as witness of a cult of Dionysus/Attis in the 6th century BCE: on this see M.G. Lancellotti – P. Xella, *Attis a Tharros?*, in A. González – J.P. Vita – J.A. Zamora (eds.), *De la tablilla a la inteligencia artificial. Homenaje al Prof. Jesús-Luis Cunchillos en su 65 aniversario*, Zaragoza 2002 (in press).

⁷⁸ Cf. Sfameni Gasparro 1978, pp. 1160-1165; 1985, pp. 11-19 (with sources and previous literature); Borgeaud 1996, p. 43 n. 53 (with recent literature).

⁷⁹ Cf. p. 73 n. 65. On this association in the framework of Orphic speculations on the Great Mother and Dionysus/Sabazius cf. Fol 1997.

⁸⁰ Cf. Cl. Alex., *Protr.* II 19 (cf. also *schol. ad. loc.*, Marcovich, p. 193); *schol. ad Luc., Iuppiter tragoedus* 8 Rabe, p. 60; the second hymn reported by the Naassenes in Hipp., *Ref.* V 9,9; *Λέξεις ῥητορικαί* s.v. “Ἀτῆς ὕψς, Bekker I, p. 207; *Etymol. Magnum*, s.v. “Ἀτῆς, Gaisford, p. 163, 54; oracle of Rhodes in Socrat. *Hist. Eccles.* III 23, 51-52, Hansen 1995. As for the iconographic evidence, it must be remembered that a statue of Attis/Dionysus is attested in the *Attideion* of Ostia (Vermaseren 1977-1989, III, 1977, pp. 118-119 n. 383); in the same building a statue of young Dionysus has been found (*id.*, pp. 112-113, n. 366) and also a candelabrum with some Satyrs represented on three of its sides (*id.*, p. 117, n. 379); cf. also the statue of Attis in the Istanbul Museum, with an ivy-leaf on its foot (Macridy Bey – Picard, 1921, p. 466 ff.).

⁸¹ “Cette sorte de pré-synchrétisme *visuel* ne pouvait manquer d’exercer une influence sur le rapprochement de la destinée des deux êtres divins. Quelle qu’ait été la diversité de leur vie légendaire, on doit compter fortement avec les preuves d’assimilation que nous apportent les monuments figurés” (Picard 1955, p. 3).

sus and Adonis is recorded in Eusebius⁸² who, after he had established the equation Attis = cut flowers, Adonis = ripe fruit, proposes them both again with the addition of Dionysus and Kore as symbols of various fruits. Firmicus Maternus ascribes to the Phrygians the idea of a parallelism between Attis and harvests⁸³, he then identifies Attis with the Sun⁸⁴ and finally presents the association of Liber, Proserpina Attis and Osiris under the sign of lamentation⁸⁵. The association of this characters is attested also in the oracle of Rhodes recorded in Socrates⁸⁶ and in Proclus⁸⁷, who mentions Dionysus, Attis and Adonis, all in connection with the Sun.

Instead, the passages from Ovid⁸⁸ and Plutarch⁸⁹, from the previous period, do not reflect particular speculations about the proposed associations. Ovid mentions various deities because they have all undergone metamorphosis; Plutarch connects them only as “foreign”.

The association linking Attis, Adonis and Osiris⁹⁰ is to be found in the identification of each god with the Sun⁹¹. The two hymns that come at the end of the Naassene document identify or associate Attis with a large number of characters that include none other than Osiris, Adonis and Dionysus⁹².

Instead, the association between Mithras and Attis seems to be of a regional nature, examples of which are the terracottas from Panticapaeum on the Bosphorus. On these terracottas Mithras is portrayed as a bull-slayer, wearing clothes peculiar to Attis⁹³.

From an analysis of the evidence for various associations and/or identifications between Attis and different gods, that are usually called “dying” gods, some interesting results emerge. Osiris does not seem to

⁸² Eus., *PE* III 11, 12; 15; 17.

⁸³ Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. relig.* III.

⁸⁴ Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. relig.* VIII 2.

⁸⁵ *Lugete Liberum, lugete Proserpinam, lugete Attin, lugete Osirin (...)*, Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. relig.* VIII 3.

⁸⁶ Socr., *Hist. Eccles.* III, 23, Hansen 1995.

⁸⁷ Procl., *Eis Helion* vv. 24-26, Abel, p. 277.

⁸⁸ Ov., *Metamorph.* V vv. 227-228: *quid Crocon, aut Attin referam, Cinyraque creatum, de quorum per me volnere surgit honor?*

⁸⁹ Plut., *Amator.* 13, 756c.

⁹⁰ On the association between Adonis and Osiris cf. de Vaux 1933; Piccaluga 1977; Ribichini 1981, pp. 176-181; Sabbatucci 1984, and other studies.

⁹¹ Cf. Macr. *Sat.* I 21, 7-11; Mart. Cap. *De nupt.* II vv. 191-192 (ed. Lenoz 1975, p. 162), where the Sun is identified with Serapis, Osiris, Attis, Ammon and Adonis, *sic vario cunctus te nomine orbis*.

⁹² Hipp., *Ref.* V 9, 8.

⁹³ Cf. Blawatsky – Kochelenko 1966, pp. 14-19; Clauss 1990, pp. 163-164.

have been involved in a significant way in the association process. Only in connection with the Sun does he become part of the group of gods with which he is invoked by different peoples. In any case the evidence is late. Julian's *IV Oration*, in which, besides Osiris, Serapis, Apollo, Dionysus, Ares, Hermes, Asclepius, Heracles, Attis, Horus, Hadad and others are mentioned, and similarly the passage in Martianus Capella, that mentions together Osiris, Attis, Adonis, Ammon and Serapis, are both to be included in solar henotheism: all these gods are in the end reabsorbed in Helios. Instead, from the sources there emerges a more systematic connection between Adonis and Attis (and sometimes Dionysus). But as R. de Vaux had shown some time ago, both the speculation recorded by Damascius on Adonis and Attis and the speculation underlying the two hymns at the end of the Naassene document reflect a "spéculation de secte"⁹⁴, which cannot therefore be applied to common beliefs. In providing the parallel between Attis and Adonis in a "naturistic" sense, Eusebius seems to be intent on creating a "common" and quite artificial label for the two, rather than be prompted by an objective analysis of their mythical and ritual traditions⁹⁵.

It only remains then to ask what may have been the meaning and purpose of these associations. I think that the identification process functioned on two different levels that then in some way were combined in the late period. On the one hand, there was the reflection of a rationalistic nature on the myths in order to find behind the deities a naturistic or ethical meaning (cf. the Stoics); on the other hand, there were the efforts made by Christian apologists, once they had discovered the potential danger of figures so similar to Christ, to emphasise the similarities between the various kinds of dying gods and then to contrast them *en bloc* with Christ⁹⁶. As for Attis in particular⁹⁷, the placing of his festal cycle in March as well as certain aspects of his ritual (funerary lamentation, spilling of blood, demonstrations of joy) could be and were objectively compared with Christian aspects. Also the fact that this cult anticipated chronologically the coming of Christ insinuated the disturbing suspicion that the Christians were in fact the ones that were

⁹⁴ De Vaux 1933, p. 40.

⁹⁵ It is interesting to remark, instead, that both are mythical kings.

⁹⁶ On the Christian re-reading of classical myths cf. Buffière 1956; Pépin 1976; Chirassi Colombo 1989.

⁹⁷ Cf. Pépin 1982; Fear 1996.

copying⁹⁸. The idea that the “resurrection” of Attis was due to a “devilish counterfeit” certainly proves how, in the eyes of one Christian, but also in those of a “pagan” inclined to lay claim to the meaning of his own beliefs⁹⁹, Attis must have seemed dangerously similar to Jesus Christ.

I shall return to the problem of the “resurrection” of Attis later. Here it is enough to note that, beyond an effective belief in his resurrection, Christian apologists still considered it possible to compare his story with Christ’s. To pagans who objected that their own ceremonies are older, they do not reply that they are two completely different universes; in fact they accept that anteriority and recognise its similarities with their own theories, justifying this by resorting to the prescient and evil action of the devil. On the other hand, the apologists were always willingly inclined to rationalising speculations on the divine that had already been made by earlier philosophers. They use them to show that the gods worshipped are not true gods but only projections of natural phenomena, false representations destined to disappear before the Christian truth of the one God. Accordingly, the more they various characters are like each other the more they reveal their inconsistency. And on the same line, *mutatis mutandis*, the Neo-Platonists also set to work, the last vigorous defenders of “dying paganism”, even if here the re-reading of myths and rites does not remove the divine nature from the characters that are their protagonists, but hypostatise them, considering them to be different manifestations of a single divine principle which in turn is organised in the various levels of reality¹⁰⁰.

4.4. *Modern re-interpretations*

The association and/or identification thus effected between the various deities seems to be characteristic of the Late Antiquity that specifically aimed at joining together different characters on the basis of similarities, real or otherwise¹⁰¹. It has been possible to identify at

⁹⁸ Cf. Pépin 1982, pp. 262-263.

⁹⁹ Cf. August., *Tract. in Joh.* VII 6, 40ff.: *Usque adeo ut ego nouerim aliquo tempore illius Pilleati sacerdotem solere dicere: “Et ipse Pilleatus christianus est”*. On the identification of the Pilleatus with Attis cf. Pépin 1982, pp. 264-267.

¹⁰⁰ An example of the dialogue/controversy between “pagan” and Christian Platonists is given by Magris 1998.

¹⁰¹ It too has, *mutatis mutandis*, precedents and parallels in several ancient religions.

least partially the reasons that led some authors to make a choice and an evaluation in an allegorical sense. This “selective” tendency, which had the aim of identifying a common pattern into which various divinities usually defined as “dying gods” could be inserted, has been extremely successful in the history of religions¹⁰². Attis is in fact one of those characters on whom the theory of the “dying god” is based. I therefore think it useful, in order to understand Attis better, to set out at least the main lines of the debate that this theory has aroused, which in some sense also belongs to his history¹⁰³.

As everyone knows, the definition “dying god” is due to Sir James G. Frazer¹⁰⁴, who used it to refer to certain male figures – more or less divine in nature – belonging to the ancient religions of the Mediterranean basin, who were central to a specific and common mythical and ritual tradition, focused on a death event and marked by periodic (seasonal/annual) rhythms. This complex of traditions has been considered – both by Frazer and later by many others – as substantially uniform and has allowed the hypothesis that there existed and spread a sort of pattern. Besides the central motif of the protagonist’s “crisis”, the salient themes of this pattern included the ritual projection of the phases of presence/absence, the relationship (or various kinds) of this person with a great goddess and connections with kingship. Frazer interpreted Adonis (Tammuz), Attis and Osiris as symbols of vegetation that dies, and then rises again in the seasonal cycle. Each of these male figures had as partner or consort a great goddess (Astarte/Ishtar, the Great Mother, Isis) who was also linked to the sphere of fertility (love, birth and death, but also war and destruction). According to Frazer, the mythical and ritual traditions centring on these characters must have had the function of representing the extinction of vegetal life and its periodic rebirth in renewed forms. The episode of the god who each year died/descended into the Netherworld and then “returned” from the kingdom of the dead, was ritualised and re-enacted through appropriate celebrations that were to “help” and “favour” this process of reinvigoration of vegetal life.

¹⁰² For a brief reexamination of this problem and the most recent bibliography see Lancellotti 2001a; cf. also Xella 2001, based on a critical reappraisal of the sources.

¹⁰³ Cf. Smith J.Z. 1990.

¹⁰⁴ J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, III ed., vols. IV-V, *The Dying God and Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, I ed. London 1890, 2 vols.; II ed. London 1900, 3 vols.; III ed. London 1911-1915, 12 vols. On the differences among the various editions cf. Smith J.Z. 1990, pp. 91-92, nn. 12-13.

For Frazer the various names in reality covered the same person (with similar functions) variously named depending on period and culture.

Over time, Frazerian theories have given rise to enthusiastic adherents and critical reactions, to developments in the furrow he traced or radical rebuttals, both at the theoretical level and at the level of the study of the individual characters to which he made appeal. These days, scholars are generally in agreement that the interpretation is by now obsolete and inadequate, that appeals to characters whose differences are as obvious as their similarities and whose connections with fecundity/fertility – granted that they exist – are rather limited and are to be considered more as elements of a code to be deciphered according to a special methodology, more attentive to the message than to the letter. In spite of this basic attitude, there is still the tendency in today's studies to adopt Frazer's approach, *mutatis mutandis*, though reshaping it into new forms. What has not been questioned in his theory is the matching of arbitrarily chosen figures – that continue to be subjected to a comparative analysis – instead of the symbolism that unites them. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to refine the concept of the death-rebirth of vegetation by removing the simplistic equation deity = nature, but without completely eliminating that idea. These gods are continually referred to as figures connected with the seasonal cycle, loading them at the same time with other symbolic meanings. This approach is to be found in the research of Bianchi and his students, in which the category of "dying and rising gods" is removed and in its place is put the macro-typology of "dèi in vicenda", personalities who are characterised by an intimate and privileged relationship with their own followers while still continuing to maintain close links with the seasonal cycle. Bianchi's theories have had a strong influence on Italian studies concerning the Attis myth and his ritual. However, foreign scholars have been more critical of those theories¹⁰⁵. It may be useful, therefore, to analyse the main lines of Bianchi's interpretation.

In the congress on the soteriology of Oriental cults that Bianchi, together with Vermaseren, organised in Rome, he perfected and codified his theory of the "dio in vicenda", the main lines of which he had already proposed in earlier studies¹⁰⁶. In particular, he proposes the singling out of a historico-typological sequence ("una serie storico-tipologica") that starts from the ancient 'fertility cults', which

¹⁰⁵ Cf. e.g. Smith J.Z. 1990, *passim*; Burkert 1987, p. 76.

¹⁰⁶ Among other works, see specially Bianchi 1965 and *Prolegomena I* in Bianchi 1979.

he defines as ‘mystic by their very nature’, goes through the soteriology of the mystery cults and finally reaches the Orphic, Neo-Platonist and Gnostic mysteriosophic re-interpretations¹⁰⁷. By the term “mystic” is meant the experience of profound and reciprocal interaction between the divine and human levels. This interaction implies that certain deities participate in events with human properties (disappearance and return, life and death) and, on the other hand, the ritual participation of man in these divine dramatic events¹⁰⁸.

There then follows a further set of subdivisions based on typology (“tipologia differenziale”): first of all there is a first form of *mystic* religion¹⁰⁹, in which interaction between a deity and a human is temporary and marked by *enthousiasmos* (Metroac and Dionysiac maenadism). A second form, defined as *mystery* religion, differs from the former because, in addition to the characteristic of the first form, there is the presence of a ritual that is initiatory, progressive and esoteric, with prospects for salvation that are also ultramundane. The faithful achieves these results by taking part in or being associated with the “event” and the destiny of the mystery god (Eleusinian mysteries, the mysteries of Mithras, and Isian and Metroac mystery initiations). Characteristic of the third form of the “mystic” religion, defined as *mysteriosophy*, is that the subject of the experience is no longer the mystery god, but the *divine soul* that fell into the human body and into the world for whom the road of salvation is no longer to take part in a ritual but to possess *sophia* and *gnosis* (Orphism-Pythagoreanism, Hermetism and Gnosticism)¹¹⁰.

To the category of gods “in vicenda”, then, would belong both

¹⁰⁷ “ (...) serie tipologico-storica che dagli antichi culti della fecondità, del dio in vicenda e della coppia divina, culti già mistici *per loro intrinseca caratteristica* (emphasis mine), sbocca nei rituali iniziatici e nella soteriologia dei culti di mistero, che poi a sua volta una misteriosofia orfico/neoplatonica/gnostica trascenderà vedendovi il simbolo della vicenda dell’anima divina persa nel corporeo”, Bianchi 1982, p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ “ (...) l’esperienza di una profonda, reciproca interferenza tra i due piani divino e umano, sia nel senso della partecipazione di certe divinità a un tipo di “vicenda” di aspetto parzialmente umano (disparizione e ritorno, vita e morte), sia nel senso di una partecipazione rituale di uomini a vicende e modi di essere connessi con le divinità di tipo suddetto”, *id.*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ First in a genetic sense too, because it is considered to be the basis of the “mystery religion”.

¹¹⁰ “Una prima forma del *mistico*, più vaga ma pur sempre specifica, è quella in cui la partecipazione o interferenza tra il divino e l’umano è temporanea e caratterizzata da *enthousiasmos*, come nelle pratiche del menadismo metroaco e dionisiaco. Una seconda forma, che chiameremo del “*misterico*”, cioè dei “culti di mistero”, si distingue perché, sulla comune base del “mistico” quale sopra descritto, implica in

Adonis and Attis, who are closely compared by Bianchi: they share a dramatic experience that ends with a miserable death, even if there is some indication that extinction is not total¹¹¹. In the rite, instead, there was an annual lamentation followed by a demonstration of joy. Accordingly, the complex of myth and ritual appertaining to Attis and Adonis comprises a seasonal event that recurs eternally, with a sequence of pain and relief that forms an epilogue which is not completely negative¹¹².

Afterwards, Bianchi made a distinction between the myth, in which the characters “terminate”, and the rite, for which they are “returning”. This is required for the purposes of the periodic celebration of their experience of presence/absence and already one can find in the myth indications of their incomplete annihilation after death¹¹³. From these premisses, he formulates his definition of “*dèi in vicenda*”: deities characterised by their absence, since they spend most of the time in the hereafter, returning to earth only on the occasion of the seasonal ritual, which (for Adonis at least) is marked by union with the fertility goddess. The rite had a joyful ending because the faithful expected their return to the next festival. A guarantee of that return was precisely their own premature death, a cycle that in some way was incomplete and therefore not closed

più la presenza di un rituale iniziatico, graduato ed esoterico, all'interno di santuari a ciò destinati (...), in vista di una beatitudine anche extra-mondana di cui l'iniziato riceve promessa e anticipazione assistendo o associandosi alla vicenda e al destino del dio misterico: tipo o forma di cui i misteri eleusini sono il modello, cui si aggiungono con novità di struttura i misteri di Mithra e le iniziazioni misteriche isiaiche e meteoache attestate rispettivamente da Apuleio, Clemente Alessandrino e Firmico Materno. Finalmente, una terza forma del “mistico”, cioè la religiosità “*misteriosofica*”, dove il soggetto della vicenda, di caduta e restaurazione, di *kathodos* e di *anodos*, non è più tanto il dio misterico, quanto l'*anima divina*, questo elemento celeste che, dalle più antiche formulazioni orfico-pitagoriche fino alle posizioni ermetiche e gnostiche, tramite il dualismo platonico, è concepito trovarsi nella tomba che è il corpo e nella caverna che è il mondo. In quest'ultima forma del mistico, cioè nel misteriosofico, valore iniziatico e salvifico non si trova più tanto in un rituale di ripetizione della vicenda, quanto in una sofia e in una gnosi (...) non disgiunte da una qualche ritualità che continua lo stile dei culti misterici (...)”, Bianchi 1982, pp. 5-6.

¹¹¹ Bianchi talks about a “dolorosa vicenda, che li portava a morire miseramente, con appena qualche cenno di una loro non completa estinzione (...)”. His next words are significant: “Fin qui, il mito forniva scarsa somiglianza con la tematica iranica e giudaica della resurrezione dei morti, e ancor meno con la tematica cristiana della resurrezione di Cristo”, *ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Id.*, p. 12.

definitively¹¹⁴. In their seasonal return, which featured in the ritual but not in the myth, the “divinità in vicenda” reactivate the fertilising seasonal process. The effect is that they were able to become cosmic divinities and be represented on the sarcophagi through an evocation that alludes ambiguously to death and to life¹¹⁵.

Bianchi speaks again of the “mystic” religion in the *Epilegomena* of the Proceedings of the Colloquium: its distinctive features are the “dio in vicenda”, the couple with a female person in which she is in a situation of superiority; the relationship myth-rite “where myth is prototypical and ritual is typical”, according to his terminology; the idea of “salvation” as the preservation and the yearly continuation of life by the land and by what lives there¹¹⁶.

The typology established by Bianchi has been accepted and developed by his school. For the purposes of our investigation, of special interest are the studies of two of his students in particular, D.M. Cosi and G. Sfameni Gasparro, who have focused part of their research work on the mythical and ritual traditions concerning Attis. It is useful to spend some time on these contributions because, at the present time, they are points of reference to those who, opposing the tendency in studies that see the god Attis as a classical construct, emphasise his original divine nature in connection with natural cycles¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁴ “(...) è più il tempo che essi, dèi morenti ma anche morti, passano laggiù che non quassù; essi ritornano, per le necessità del rito stagionale, e tornati si coniugano, così almeno Adonis ad Alessandria, con la dea di ogni fecondità, e la loro morte (...) è accompagnata non dalla constatazione di un ritorno a breve termine, che chiuda definitivamente il ciclo, ma da un rasserenante annunzio, un gioioso riaversi dei fedeli, che è certezza che Adonis e Attis vivono ancora in qualche parte, e non hanno cessato la loro tornante funzione (...) Proprio perché morti anzitempo, immaturi, e sterili di figli, e non morti per consunzione dopo una vita patriarcale, Attis e Adonis non finiscono; proprio perché evirato, in patetico contesto, vede Attis sui suoi *abscissa* concentrarsi l'ondata tornante della vita, che è qualcosa di più e di diverso rispetto al frazeriano “spirito del grano”, *id.*, pp. 12-13.

¹¹⁵ “(...) con una evocazione ambigua tra predicazione della malinconica fatalità della morte e vago accenno di vita, quella dell'universo e quella, chissà, del piccolo essere che la pietra del sarcofago sta lentamente rodendo”, *id.*, p. 14.

¹¹⁶ Bianchi 1982a, p. 923.

¹¹⁷ Cf. the remarks of Sfameni Gasparro herself in a recent contribution concerning Roller's interpretation: “Non è possibile in questa sede discutere in dettaglio la recente formula interpretativa di L.E. Roller che fa di Attis una “creazione” greca, frutto della proiezione a livello mitico della figura del Gallo, il devoto eunuco della dea, privo di qualsiasi autentica ed autonoma consistenza religiosa (...). La tesi, di sapore evemeristico, non è del tutto nuova. Per una diversa esegesi, fondata sulle valenze ctonio-vegetali del personaggio, nella sua specifica consistenza mitica e culturale, ci sia permesso rinviare al nostro saggio (...)” (Sfameni Gasparro 1996, p. 70 n. 78). The essay to which Sfameni Gasparro is referring is Sfameni Gasparro 1985.

In his contribution with the title “Salvatore e salvezza nei misteri di Attis”¹¹⁸, in connection with the rites of March performed in Rome, Così distinguishes the section that deals with the processions of the reeds and the pine, which is seasonal and agricultural, from the sacred mystery that focuses on the death and “resurrection” of the god¹¹⁹.

After an account of and commentary on the *symbolon* in the two versions given by Clement of Alexandria¹²⁰ and Firmicus Maternus¹²¹, that Così thinks was recited in the night between the 24th and 25th of March, that is between *Dies sanguinis* and *Hilaria*¹²², he then analyses the possible soteriological perspectives that the rite, in which the *symbolon* was recited, could offer the faithful: hope in salvation was justified only by a myth that envisages a god who saved himself (or who is saved)¹²³. In its original form the myth must have been the one recorded by Arnobius¹²⁴, where the dead Attis is preserved with his body intact to which is added the growth of his hair and the movement of his little finger. In Arnobius’ time, therefore, the faithful worshipped Attis understood as dead, but endowed with an eternal (but extremely secondary) vitality¹²⁵. To explain the meaning of the *sui generis* fate of Attis, now dead, Così turns to the evidence from Eusebius¹²⁶ in which Attis is associated with Adonis. This comparison is shared by Così for their presumed connection with the rhythm of the seasons and the common destiny of the dead not completely deprived of vitality¹²⁷. They are not gods who are reborn after death, but, in spite of their death, they are not completely annihilated and the wait for their return by the faithful may

¹¹⁸ Così 1976. It must be stressed that Così quotes Bianchi’s actual words in order to explain the meaning he ascribes to the term “misterico”, which shows his total adhesion to Bianchi’s theory.

¹¹⁹ Così 1976, p. 54.

¹²⁰ Clem. Alex., *Protr.* II 15.

¹²¹ Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. relig.* XVIII 1-2.

¹²² As a matter of fact, the scholar is not sure of this chronological setting: “Effettivamente ciò che sappiamo di questi rituali non ci permette di essere certi che essi si svolgessero proprio durante questa notte particolare”, Così 1976, p. 56.

¹²³ *Id.*, p. 61.

¹²⁴ Arnob., *Adv. nat.*, V 5-7.

¹²⁵ Così 1976, p. 62.

¹²⁶ Eus. *PE* III 11, 12.

¹²⁷ “(...) legati come sono entrambi (*sc.* Adonis and Attis) al ritmo agricolo delle stagioni e presentati al fedele, pur in una alternanza di presenza e di assenza, sempre nella fissità (appena mitigata per Attis) della morte”, *id.*, p. 63.

be considered a sort of presence within absence¹²⁸. At the level of ritual, connected with the seasonal cycle of vegetation, the precarious presence already carried within itself the announcement of a new absence (at least for Adonis). It would not then be a resurrection of the god so much as a return or a cyclical revival¹²⁹. Continuing with his comparison with Adonis, Così reaches the conclusion that Attis, even though dead, preserves a beauty that is a partial victory over his death and hope in immortality for his followers¹³⁰. According to his analysis, there would then be a link between the seasonal cycle aspects of these characters and a possible soteriological perspective for their devotees.

Sfameni Gasparro takes up the definition of the “dèi in vicenda” for those protagonists of both the so-called “fertility cults” and of the mystery cults that are subject to crisis, disappearance, death (sometimes) and a positive outcome. They would all be grouped together from the “connection, variously defined, with the sphere of nature. A certain parallelism develops between their own vicissitude and the seasonal cycle, agrarian rhythms or anyhow chthonic fertility, and the realm of animal and human fertility”¹³¹.

Moving from these general considerations on gods “in vicenda”, Sfameni Gasparro then goes on to study Attis, emphasising “the character’s profound and multiple connections with a sphere of vegetal fertility. He would then come under the category of the so-called “fertility gods”, significant examples of whom are provided by the mythologies and cults of the Near East, and who appear to be involved variously in an alternating situation of presence and absence”¹³². As she explains, using the definition of Frazer does not mean adopting the pattern of death-resurrection but rather recognising “undoubted connections with the sphere of fertility and their quality as deities typically subject to a vicissitude”¹³³. As for the soteriological perspectives, “the annual re-evocation of Attis’ doleful destiny, with its joyful conclusion in the certainty of his survival (even in disappearing and death, which nevertheless produces

¹²⁸ “(...) non sono però annientati, perché la loro attesa confidente e sicura può già essere chiamata una presenza: una presenza nell’assenza”, *ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Id.*, p. 64.

¹³¹ Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. xvii.

¹³² *Ead.*, p. 29.

¹³³ *Ead.*, p. 30.

spring buds and the evergreen presence of the pine-tree) and of his privileged position beside the Great Goddess, could appear to the devotee as a renewal of his own existential essence in an ordered cosmos whose natural rhythms are guaranteed and supported by divine entites. It could thus appear as a specific chance of “salvation”¹³⁴.

Here I do not intend to discuss the model of “dio in vicenda” in general, even if, as has been noted, the typology outlined cannot be adopted as a typological pattern that is historically based since it arbitrarily takes into account only some “dying gods”¹³⁵ and passes over others in silence¹³⁶. Furthermore, many of the gods that are considered have been shown by recent studies to have either weak or non-existent connections with the seasonal cycle of vegetation¹³⁷.

The problem to be considered here is quite different: as I think what has been discussed up to now has proved sufficiently, all the connections between Attis and vegetation seem to be of a secondary nature and in any case later than the oldest form of the tradition about him. In particular, it is not possible to prove, except for a rather late period and as the work of writers or schools – whether “pagan” or “Christian” – that exercised their own personal reflection on the myth or ritual of Attis, the existence of a connection with seasonal fertility/fecundity. In fact, the whole history of Attis pronounces in favour of an attitude that is explicitly non-generative. The cyclic aspect is, if anything, to be attributed to an emphasis on the solar and cosmological character of Attis, in which the renewal of vegetation is only one aspect among many in the wider renewal of the cosmic order. As a result, the typological model of the “mystic”¹³⁸ god, according to Bianchi’s theory, cannot be applied to Attis except at the price of forcing him into an *a priori* model that involves several distortions and omissions. On the other hand, to speak about Attis in generic terms means reconstructing on paper and in an arbitrary way a uniform character that historically never existed

¹³⁴ *Ead.*, p. 125.

¹³⁵ It must be stressed that not all these figures can be labelled *sic et simpliciter* as “gods”, as for example in the case of Adonis. What seems to us to be an ambiguous status – we are obviously accustomed to the classical distinction between gods, heroes and human beings – is due to the different parameters and definitions adopted by every civilization.

¹³⁶ Cf. i.e. the Ugaritic god Baal.

¹³⁷ Cf. Xella 2001.

¹³⁸ At least as far his connection with the seasonal cycle is concerned.

as such¹³⁹. Each Attis who appears in the various documents is “true” because he existed historically in a religion at a particular time. Of course, there is no single Attis who subsumes all his various characteristics in one archetype. Every attempt at reconstructing *the ultimate Attis* leads to artificial results that imply an historical leveling of the evidence and inevitably to misinterpreting them.

As I hope is clear from the research undertaken so far, Attis is a character whose history extends with a considerable span over space and time, and within that history the mythical and ritual traditions about him in Anatolia in the 7th and 8th centuries BCE are very different from the traditions of Greece and Rome in Late Antiquity. Those traditions are distinguished especially by re-reading and reflecting on the myth and ritual in order to express new religious requirements.

At this juncture a reconsideration of the myth and ritual of Attis is necessary in an attempt to grasp those aspects that, even though formulated in various ways, could be used as the basis for developing, at a later period, possible soteriological perspectives, irrespective of a renewal of the seasonal cycle.

In short, this is the right moment for reconsidering the dossier on Attis in connection with the problem of death and the Netherworld, in connection with which kind of salvation his cult could offer and in connection with the meaning to ascribe to his possible “resurrection”.

¹³⁹ The same applies of course to all the other figures, traditionally considered to be “dying gods”, such as Osiris, Adonis, Dumuzi-Tammuz, etc. It is a question of a general methodological aspect on which it is not even worth insisting, cf. e.g. Lancelotti 2001a and Xella 2001.

CHAPTER FIVE

ATTIS AND DEATH: MYTHICAL DEATH, RITUAL MOURNING AND HUMAN DESTINY

5.1. *How to die and become a god*

In the mythical and ritual traditions about Attis¹, death is a central theme that accompanies and characterises him from the very earliest documentation to the very latest modifications. This theme, however, appears formulated in different ways with different implications, at the levels of both myth and ritual, depending on the period and the place of worship. Accordingly, it will not be unproductive to recapitulate some of the salient aspects that have emerged from our research in connection with the theme of death.

With regard to the Anatolian evidence, the oldest archaeological sources substantiate an association between the Great Mother and places of burial. The extremely meagre epigraphic documentation in old Phrygian on the term “Attis”, however, indicates that he was connected with the royal family and perhaps even the king himself, who was involved in religious contexts that are not always clear, although in some cases he is obviously linked to a funerary setting.

In this particular perspective we may remember that the version of the myth as recorded by Diodorus Siculus² sets Attis within a dynastic struggle that ends with the institution of a grave cult. This cult has been shown to have similarities and a continuity with the royal Anatolian model and in particular with royal Hittite funerals. These funerals, it will be remembered, mark the transition of the king (and queen) from the human to the “divine” dimension. Dead kings, in fact, were accorded a cult modelled on the cult of deities in the temples. Their mausoleums, the “Houses of Stone”, are buildings that are

¹ This chapter is a longer, revised version of my contribution (Lancellotti 2001) published in the volume about dying and disappearing deities in ancient Mediterranean traditions edited by P. Xella (Xella 2001).

² Diod. Sic., III 58, 1 – 59, 8.

able to maintain themselves and provide independently for the permanent cult of the dead. The account given in Diodorus Siculus seems to refer specifically to the foundation of this type of building in Pessinous. Attis would appear to be, in fact, an ancient member of the royal clan for whom there was a cult similar to the cult reserved for dead monarchs in the Hittite period.

The "Lydian" version of the Attis myth, where the youth is killed by a boar, that seems to be a revised form of an older "hunting myth", also seems to be connected with this "royal" ideology, as ancient Near Eastern parallels indicate.

The fall of the Phrygian monarchy led to a transformation of the political situation which the religious institutions also had to take into account. The centre of Pessinous, at least from the 3rd cent. BCE, seems to be a "temple-state" governed by a priestly caste. A new dynastic model founded a priestly theocracy, although it had strong continuity with the preceding funereal cult.

Whereas in the version in Diodorus Siculus and the "Lydian" version, the death of Attis gives rise exclusively to a funereal cult, although we have no information on what happened to him *afterwards*, in the "Phrygian" version there is instead a sequel to his unfortunate experience. After death, the body of Attis is preserved intact (Pausanias), to which is added the movement of his little finger³ and the growth of his hair (Arnobius). However, all this should not be interpreted as indicating his presumed "resurrection". In the myth, the preservation of his body is considered precisely as the opposite of resurrection, which is explicitly denied him by Zeus. The death of Attis is the very nucleus of the cult itself: he *must* die and his death guarantees him relocation to the other dimension from which, though transformed and indeed precisely because he is transformed, he can

³ Scholars had interpreted the preservation of the finger and its movement in various ways: for a review of the different opinions cf. Borgeaud 1996, pp. 82-84. In particular, it is worth remembering the proposal of seeing here a connection between the finger and the phallus (among the most recent studies cf. Vermaseren 1977 and Haas 1982). Burkert quotes the cases of Orestes' grave, the Attis myth and other ancient and medieval tales, maintaining that "it is tempting to connect finger sacrifice with castration" (Burkert 1996, p. 50-51). Recalling Frazer's interpretation of the grave, where Orestes' finger was buried as a substitute for the hero's person, Borgeaud deems the case of Attis to be "analogue, mais inverse: seul le doigt échappe à la mort du corps; il représente donc Attis vivant" (Borgeaud 1996, p. 847). As for me, I accept this statement, but on condition that the survival of Attis is located in the Netherworld, and not in this world.

no longer return⁴. References to him as a dead person *sui generis*, with an incorruptible body that is granted minimal movements, are evidence for his effective permanence in the Netherworld. Unlike the other dead, here he is not reduced to a larval state but is to some extent active and functions positively on behalf of the living, in the same way as certain ancestors or even the Greek heroes, who are expected to intervene (not always favourably) in the present. To some extent, for Attis also death is the price to pay for being heroised or deified⁵. On the other hand, since the myth does not cater for the possibility of his “return”, equally excluded seems to be Attis living together with the Great Mother in an other-worldly dimension. On the contrary, it is in fact the Great Mother, at least in the version of Arnobius, who initiates prototypically a series of funereal ritual practices that help to assure for Attis a correct burial and a secure sojourn in the Netherworld.

Ritualised death: the funeral lament

The funereal dimension of Attis also seems to be confirmed at the cultic level: there is a great deal of Greek and Latin documentary evidence for a funereal ritual marked by weeping and lament that imitates the model of pre-Christian lamentation in the Mediterranean region⁶. As is well known, the purpose of this lamentation is to recover the death, which from an unacceptable natural fact becomes part of the cultural domain and it is changed into something of value. In the words of De Martino, “se il lamento non è reso, il morto non entra nel regno dei morti e resta nella rischiosa condizione di cadavere vivente, che tormenta i vivi tornando in modo irrelativo; d'altra

⁴ In these terms cf. the interpretation of Bianchi, who assigns to the incorruptibility of Attis' corpse the value of a “permanenza nella morte” (permanent stay in death), rather than a resurrection, even if his incorruptibility cannot be interpreted as a presupposition of the ritual return of the god, see *infra*. According to Borgeaud, the partial preservation of Attis' body might instead be interpreted as a refusal to accept his death. The motif of the refusal could also be located in the account by Diodorus Siculus, where Attis' body is never found: “Cadavre imputrescible, ou corps perdu: les deux propositions ne sont-elles pas homologues, redondantes dans leur refus de l'inexorable?”, Borgeaud 1996, p. 82.

⁵ Cf. generally the classic work by Brelich 1958, and quite recently Merlo – Xella 2001, with the most recent relevant literature.

⁶ Review of the sources in Hepding 1903. For the theme of ritual mourning, it is still indispensable to refer to De Martino 1975.

parte nel corso della lamentazione le valenze di allontanamento si legano dialetticamente a quelle di riappropriazione, di interiorizzazione e di rapporto sul piano dei valori morali, sociali, politici, poetici e conoscitivi”⁷.

An almost constant element in the ritual tradition concerning Attis is, then, the reference to Phrygia in the sources as the place where the celebration of lamentation was established. On the evidence in Greek, the account by Diodorus Siculus⁸, as we have seen, ends with the institution of a grave cult in honour of Attis at Pessinous. Arrianus provides proof that the Roman celebrations for Attis go back to a Phrygian tradition⁹, and he also stresses the attention given in the ritual to the sad moment in the episode. Lucian also states that there was a spring lamentation for Attis in Phrygia¹⁰. The permanence of this tradition is also documented by Eusebius for his time¹¹. The scholiast of the *Alexipharmacōn* refers the “Lydian” version of the Attis myth¹² to the institution of spring ceremonies by the Phrygians in which there is weeping for the youth. As for Latin writers, Statius refers to the ritual weeping of Phrygian women¹³; Arnobius connects both the mythical events and the institution of ritual lamentations (although he knows it in the “Roman” version¹⁴) with Phrygia, and in particular with Pessinous; lastly, Firmicus Maternus refers to the existence at Pessinous of annual lamentations connected with the death of Attis¹⁵.

Whereas for Greece we have no certain proof that the ritual in which Attis appeared was linked to a funeral ceremony¹⁶, the celebration in

⁷ De Martino 1975, p. 350.

⁸ Diod. Sic., III 58.

⁹ Arrian., *Tactic.* 33,4.

¹⁰ Lucian., *Tragodopodagra* vv. 30-32.

¹¹ Eus., *PE* II 2, 41-45. I consider that the evidence from Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 69) is not to be included in the dossier, that is, where he talks about a Phrygian cult addressed to a divine being put asleep in winter by lamentations and woken in summer by songs of a Bacchic type, but without specific mention of Attis. This *theos* has been identified with a “Phrygian” Dionysus (Sabazius, Men), see the scholars quoted by Sfameni Gasparro 1985, p. 60 n. 141. Elsewhere, where Plutarch explicitly refers to Attis, he invokes the “Lydian” tradition (*Sert.* 1, 4).

¹² *Schol. in Alexiph.* v. 8, Geymonat a, p. 32-33.

¹³ Stat., *Silv.* V 3, 242-245.

¹⁴ Arnob., *Adv. nat.* V 5-7.

¹⁵ Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. relig.* III.

¹⁶ On the interpretation of one of the two κλίναι – mentioned by a decree of the *orgeōnes* at Piraeus – as “funeral beds”, cf. Foucart 1873, p. 93. Roller too is inclined to consider the *strōsis* of the *Attideia* as linked to a funeral rite (Roller 1999, p. 223).

March of the “holy week” in Rome was certainly of a funereal nature.

The rites that are repeated each year on the tomb of Attis in Phrygia or near the temple of the Mother of the gods in Rome are therefore commemorative. That is, they *remember* an event, they *commemorate* it, *they do not re-enact* it, that is, make it *happen again*. The commemoration does not imply belief in a real return but is only the ritual evocation of events that result in the present, conclusive situation, that in this way is supported and refounded from time to time. Of course, when exported from Phrygia to Rome, the basic outlines of Attis and the traditions associated with him are taken up, yet they undergo a revision process defined by the different ideological, social and political contexts, and so they have different functions. In their land of origin and in their oldest phases, the commemoration was for an ancient dead royal personage and the periodic rites were intended to ensure his favour as guaranteeing the well-being of king and nation, and in a wider sense, of the cosmos, that in this way was periodically re-established. This beneficial function of Attis persists in Pessinous, in spite of the passage from the figure of the monarch to the figure of the “anti-royal” priest. In Rome also the link with death typical of Attis persists. His definitive presence in the Netherworld continues to be, exactly as in Phrygia, connected with the collective well-being¹⁷ that, in a changed historical situation, coincides with the well-being of emperor and the cosmos that he represents in its entirety¹⁸. The very process of turning Attis into a cosmic figure, that began in the first centuries of our era and transformed him into a pantocratic power – above and beyond new speculative interpretations by philosophers – does not seem to contradict the idea of his death, as shown by the finds in Ostia¹⁹.

Collective well-being, then, but also individual well-being obtained through the mediation of the Galli and the celebration of the *taurobolium*.

At this point, it is necessary to take into consideration the *Hilaria*,

¹⁷ In Hittite royal funerary ceremonies, the cult addressed to the deceased king – the purpose of which is his deification – secures a peaceful reign for his descendants (future kings). The dead king is told: “Non ti adirare in seguito, sii benevolo verso i tuoi figli! La tua regalità sia salda per i (tuo) nipoti e pronipoti, ed avverrà che il tuo tempio sarà circondato da timore e ci saranno sacrifici per te”, KUB 39 n. 7 rev. IV 2-6 (quoted by Del Monte 1987, p. 98).

¹⁸ Cf. Tertull., *Apol.* XXV 2-6 and the taurobolic dedications *pro salute imperatoris* quoted in Duthoy 1969, p. 68 n. 2. Cf. in general Graillot 1912, p. 128.

¹⁹ Both the statue of Attis *omnipotens* and the statue which represents him in agony come from the same place.

celebrations that were inserted in the festival cycle of Attis in the late period (after 4th century CE). These celebrations came after the days of mourning and lamentation and preceded the *Lavatio*, the closing rite of the “holy week”²⁰. The presence of these celebrations leads to reflections on the possible evolution of the mythical and ritual traditions in respect of his “resurrection” and, as a consequence, the possible opening to his followers of a soteriological perspective.

All the evidence for the *Hilaria* is later than the 4th century²¹, and stresses its joyful nature but is silent about praxis and content, providing instead a “learned” re-interpretation of the feast. Traces of a personal revision are given in the account by Firmicus Maternus²²: in substance his version of the myth follows the “Phrygian” version, distinguished by the death of Attis as a consequence of his refusal of Cybele’s love²³ and the resulting institution of the grave cult for the dead youth. The parallelism ensuing established between the Attis episode and the episode of the corn, which remains an *unicum*, rather seems to be due to Firmicus’ own interpretation. This speculation must have been provoked by the repeated commemoration of the funeral ceremonies in spring²⁴. The reference to a “resurrection” of Attis seems to be rather an interpretation by Firmicus than an origi-

²⁰ Different opinions have been expressed about the *Hilaria*. The most convincing interpretation is still Vermaseren’s (Vermaseren 1977, pp. 119-123), according to which these feasts are to be placed before the *Lavatio*, and seem to be unknown before the 4th century.

²¹ The account by Valerius Flaccus (*Arg.* VIII vv. 239-249) cannot be taken into consideration because it only describes the joyful atmosphere which marked the transport of Cybele’s image through the town, after the purificatory bath in the Almus.

²² Firm. Mat., *De err. prof. rel.* III. The hypothesis of Vermaseren, who ascribes to Firmicus Maternus a greater adherence to “popular thought” than other sources, based on the assumption that the Latin writer is attacking “the simple believers who worship Attis” (Vermaseren 1977, p. 123), does not seem convincing to me; *inter alia*, it must be stressed that Firmicus does not mention the *Hilaria* explicitly; moreover his account, like the others, can not be considered a simple report about the beliefs of Attis’ devotees, because it shows clear signs of having been “rewritten”. See e.g. his reference to Phrygians as people who worship the earth, a statement which seems to be influenced by Stoic doctrines concerning the Great Mother (for example, Lucretius, II 581-628, and Varro, *Ant. div.* Fr. 267 Cardauns = Aug., *De civ. dei* VII 24). Cf. Chirassi Colombo 1989, pp. 40-41; Borgeaud 1996 p. 79 and p. 102 n. 45.

²³ This refusal must surely belong to the “betrayal” of Attis, who chooses to marry himself.

²⁴ Concerning the equation Attis = corn proposed by Firmicus, Chirassi Colombo remarks: “E’ un tipo di interpretazione che con ogni probabilità coglie parzialmente un aspetto di Attis, quello economico-agrario appuntato sull’articolazione calendariale in funzione anche agricola. Ma certo non ne esaurisce e neppure definisce in maniera accettabile la più complessa *ratio* teologico-ideologica” (Chirassi Colombo 1989, p. 41).

nal element of the Phrygian cult. The verb *revivere* used for Attis – who would be a sort of “double” of the corn – makes particularly clear the distance separating his “resurrection” and Christ’s²⁵. The risks involved in possible similarities between the Attis story and Christ’s are thus overcome precisely by demonstrating that the apparent “similarities” conceal instead an unbridgeable chasm. On the other hand, the very mention of a permanent grave cult in Pessinous implies that also according to the evidence from Firmicus Maternus, for the Phrygians Attis is truly dead.

The mention of the *Hilaria* by the philosopher Sallust²⁶ and by Julian²⁷ is only the stimulus for connecting the joyful part of the Roman ritual with the ascent of the soul. These references are extremely interesting for knowledge of philosophical speculations about Attis, but they are of no help in learning more about the actual ritual²⁸. In fact, as can be deduced from the references by both Sallust and Julian to other aspects of the myth or rite on which we are better informed, these references are only a spur for reflection within a theology, a cosmology and an anthropology that are typically Neo-Platonist.

The fact that for Sallust and Julian the *Hilaria* are a symbol of the purified soul’s path towards the hyperuraniun does not necessarily imply that this rite was linked with the “resurrection” of Attis or even only of his return. This is what the evidence from Damascius²⁹ seems to mean. It is a personal account of a journey made by Damascius to Hierapolis in Phrygia³⁰, where there was a chasm from which lethal fumes were discharged. He goes down into this *barathron* and succeeds in returning from it alive. Next, he has a dream that is connected with the previous experience: in the dream, Damascius is Attis, the one for

²⁵ Paradoxically enough, however, Jesus Christ’s sufferings were also interpreted as a vegetation passion, cf. De Martino 1957: at the close of his study, he quotes the words of a modern Greek peasant-woman on the occasion of Easter (20th cent.): “Sono in ansia perché se domani Cristo non risorge, noi quest’anno non avremo grano” (quoted again in De Martino 1975, p. 344).

²⁶ Sall., *De diis et mundo* IV.

²⁷ Jul., *V oratio*.

²⁸ Even if Julian speaks about a “trumpet blast” which follows the *dendrophoria* and precedes the *Hilaria* (169c), and Sallust hints at the consumption of a meal based on milk, they present these events in a “revised” version, without providing any information about their meaning in the ritual context.

²⁹ Damasc., *Vita Isidori excerpta* 131, Zintzen, pp. 176-178.

³⁰ On Hierapolis and the *barathron* cf. most recently Ritti 1989-90.

³¹ Strab., XIII 4, 14; Plin., *Nat. Hist.* II 208, Amm. Marc. XXIII 6, 18, Cass. Dio, LVIII 27, 3.

whom the Mother of the gods celebrates the feast of the *Hilaria* which means that Damascius and his teacher, Isidore, who accompanied him, have experienced "salvation from Hades".

This passage is particularly important as it could be adduced as proof that, at least in the late period, the *Hilaria* did in fact refer to a "resurrection" of Attis. To understand it correctly, however, three moments have to be distinguished, that are successive and cannot be merged: the descent of the two philosophers into the Plutonium, the dream, and the interpretation of the dream by Damascius. First of all it should be noted that the Plutonium of Hierapolis was known and often visited even in ancient times, as attested by Strabo, and these frequent visits last until the time of Cassius Dio³¹. The abyss was positioned near Hades, as is clear from the very name Plutonium³². However, this link between the present world and the Hereafter was usually barred to everyone: the deadly fumes, that attracted the attention of the curious and of scientists, were so powerful that they did not allow visitors to come too close without ending up being poisoned. So little birds were sold in order to check the effects of the gasses released: as soon as they were set free over the abyss the birds fell lifeless. One exception comprised the Galli³³ who, in perfect agreement with their role of mediator between this world and the "otherness", go down into and re-emerge safely from the chasm³⁴. This was proof of the Great Mother's protection for her favourite followers³⁵. However, Damascius and Isidore are also successful in this enterprise, appropriating in some sense a function that does not belong to them. This places them in a situation of imbalance because, although they are men, they act like Galli. Afterwards, Damascius dreams of being Attis and of arriving warmly welcomed into the *Hilaria* of the Mother of the gods. In the dream there is no reference to a resurrection that could in any way be connected with the feast itself³⁶. Instead, it is

³² Cf. Ritti 1989-1990, p. 863.

³³ Here it is not important to determine what expedient allowed them to achieve the result, but rather to determine the result itself and the meaning derived from it.

³⁴ Asklepiodotos, who relates to Damascius how he made a partial descent into a chasm, adds that whoever was *enthousiōn*, that is, possessed by Cybele, was able to make the whole journey (Damasc., *Vita Isidori* 131, Zintzen, p. 178). Who is more entitled to follow this itinerary than the Galli, who (also as a result of their mutilation) have perpetual relations with the goddess?

³⁵ Cf. Strab., XIII 4, 14.

³⁶ It seems instead to celebrate the fact that Attis continues to live, even if in the Netherworld.

Damascius who establishes a connection between the dream and the experience he has just undergone: "In Hierapolis, having fallen asleep, it seemed in a dream that I had become Attis and for me was celebrated by the Mother of the gods the feast called *Hilaria*: this shows that our salvation from Hades did happen".

The statement by Damascius is to be taken in its exact literal meaning: he has obtained salvation from Hades, that is, he came out of the Plutonium alive, obviously not a common occurrence. The reference to the *Hilaria* is not a reference to a "resurrection" of Attis but can instead be connected with that "kindness" that the Mother of the gods bestows on Attis as soon as, having died, a relationship of "correct" love is set up between the two. Furthermore, in the March festivals the *Hilaria* followed the *Dies Sanguinis*, the day on which the emasculation and death of Attis were commemorated and through them his reconciliation with the Great Mother while at the same time a new contingent of Galli was initiated each year. Emasculation and mythical death (Attis) and ritual emasculation (the Galli), in spite of the inevitable suffering, were both necessary. The *Hilaria*, which follow that suffering, express awareness that the sacrifice is not an end in itself. Now Attis, dead in the world but alive in the Netherworld, can truly love and be loved by the goddess, as he would never have been able to do in his mortal life. Now the chosen men have become Galli and so, not being men like the others, love the Great Mother and are loved by her, being projected, through emasculation, into a dimension of "otherness". Unlike Attis, who loved and was loved by the goddess in a "human" way and so went beyond the limits established by the very condition of being mortal, and moved towards the destiny of death, the Galli love and are loved by the goddess through the rite, a special relationship sanctioned by a non-lethal emasculation that however condemns them to being constantly marginalised from society. This does not prevent the same society, precisely in virtue of their "liminality", from using them as privileged mediators for communicating with the "other". Benevolence and privileged relationship with the Great Mother are the advantages that the Galli permanently enjoy, as specifically demonstrated by the experience in the abyss of Hierapolis. As for the evidence from Damascius, it is possible to verify that through the mediation of Attis-*Hilaria* (dream) an identification is established between Damascius and the Galli (experience): only the Great Mother's protection, conferred on him as on a new Attis, could save the philosopher from dead by asphyxiation.

5.3. *Funereal beliefs and the Hereafter*

The myth of Attis and his tragic end are represented in the images of the Roman period. Some of these images show him at the most dramatic moment, his end, or already in the coldness of death, with his eyes closed, sometimes with his legs wide apart to show he had been castrated³⁷. In these representations he is often surrounded by objects connected with funereal symbolism such as the poppy, the cypress or the palm³⁸. But beyond the images of the death of Attis, of special interest is the evidence that prefers to connect him with death understood as a human experience. In other words, it is necessary to examine the meaning to be given to those funereal representations or funereal epigraphs which refer to Attis or more generally to the Metroac cult.

Figurines of Attis have been found inside tombs³⁹ just as he is depicted on funereal monuments⁴⁰. He is also represented on sarcophagi in some of which he is the image of winter⁴¹. As in the case of Adonis, what is emphasised is chiefly his wretched condition, the sadness of his end⁴². Also, apart from rare exceptions, there does not seem to be room in the funereal epigraphs that allude to the Metroac complex for triumphalist perspectives, the emphasis is always on what the dead person has irretrievably lost⁴³. Yet alongside such evidence, that seems to emphasise the definitive entry of the dead person into the Netherworld, there is other evidence that is more ambiguous. This evidence comprises images of the pine cone, the branch, the poppy or the pomegranate flower, that scholars interpret as symbols of immortality⁴⁴. However, in fact, these symbols are all very common in funereal art and could refer to the Netherworld that the dead person is entering rather than to immortality⁴⁵.

³⁷ Cf. Karwiese 1968-1971; Vermaseren 1981.

³⁸ Cf. Vermaseren 1966, pp. 31-38 and 1981.

³⁹ Cf. Graillot 1912, p. 438 and 500; Vermaseren 1966, p. 18; Cosi 1976, p. 69 n. 169; Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 90-92 (with additional bibliography).

⁴⁰ Cf. Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 92-93 and nn. 36-42 (with bibliography).

⁴¹ Cf. Cosi 1976, pp. 70-71. An exception would be the coffin where, on the contrary, Attis symbolises Spring; unfortunately, the loss of this object – only a drawing of which remains – makes it impossible to verify the source (*id.*, p. 71).

⁴² Cf. Ribichini 1982a, and also Nock 1932, p. 356. According to Boyancé (Boyancé 1952), Attis on the funerary monuments should be related to the theme of the *adros*, that is, one who dies before his time.

⁴³ *CIL* VI 10098; *CIG* 6206; Bücheler 1895, I, n. 513, p. 245ff., discussed in Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 94-96.

In some inscriptions there are allusions to the soul's stay in heaven after death. Now, if it is true that none of this evidence is explicitly connected with the Metroac cult and therefore this idea need not necessarily come from it, the fact still remains that, at least at a certain period, speculations on the soul's destiny were interwoven with those on the cult of the Great Mother and of Attis⁴⁶. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that at a certain period and in some circles there began to be reflections on Attis that led to his experiences being read in soteriological terms⁴⁷. However, and this is a fact that should in no way be underestimated, when a more or less explicit association between Attis and the human soul is found in the sources, what is emphasised is *never* death but emasculation. Almost paradoxically, it is sterility/infertility and not the incorruptibility of his body that characterises Attis soteriologically! This estimation of sterility as a consciously sought condition must, of course, be set within those speculations that, with greater or less emphasis, imply a negative appraisal not so much of the cosmos as instead of human existence, understood as the divine element residing in the world⁴⁸. In any case, such speculations are sustained by suggestions that already derive from the tradition of myth and ritual concerning Attis: in the "Phrygian" version of the myth, the fatal emasculation of Attis ratifies man's impossibility to love a goddess, setting the limits of the human condition but at the same time, the non-fatal emasculation of the father-in-law or of Gallus founds the category of Galli. Self-emasculation, which in connection with Attis is indissolubly linked with death inasmuch as it founds the *sui generis* kingship of Pessinous, for the Galli is set as the obligatory transition for acquiring the status of mediators between the human and divine worlds.

⁴⁴ Review of sources and interpretations in Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 97-102.

⁴⁵ The works of Cumont, 1942 and 1949 are still basic for Roman funerary symbolism.

⁴⁶ Cf. the Roman inscription from the 1st cent. CE (Bendinelli 1923) where the deceased asks the *sanctissima mater* (whose identity is not clear) to be raised up to the borders of Tartarus; the funeral inscription (CIL VI 13528) concerning a *vates frugae mater* (perhaps a priest of the Great Mother) where there is an indication of the notion of the heavenly immortality of the soul; a funeral cippus (CIL III 6384) on which Attis is represented in a melancholy attitude and where it is said that the soul of the dead will ascend to the holy heaven (sources and summaries of interpretations in Sfameni Gasparro 1985, pp. 97-98).

⁴⁷ I refer particularly to the position of the Gnostic Naassenes, to the *V Oration, To the Mother of the Gods*, by the Emperor Julian, and to the treatise by the philosopher Sallust, *De diis et mundo* IV. Cf. ch. 4.

⁴⁸ Of course, making the due distinctions between the Neo-Platonist position of Julian and Sallust and the Gnostic position of the Naassenes.

The taurobolic rites, bypassing these Galli, allow the creation of a more intimate and direct relationship between the devotees and the couple Great Mother-Attis. But it is a relationship that always goes through emasculation, however symbolic⁴⁹, and not through death. In both the rite and the myth Attis belongs to the world of the dead, from which he does not return, whereas it is castration that is the mediating element between the two worlds, human and extra-human, that otherwise are incompatible and “closed”. In any case, the possible presence of “mysteries” in the cult does not imply *tout court* soteriological perspectives but rather that such salvation lies precisely in the very acceptance of present reality⁵⁰.

Eschatological soteriology appears only at a late period and as a result of the break-up of the polytheistic system⁵¹. It has a marginal position in the mysteries and is more central in the theological reflections of philosophical, Gnostic and Hermetic circles that use ancient traditions, giving them a different reading in a perspective of novelty rather than of continuity⁵². On the other hand, this approach is an answer to the new soteriological demands that emerge when a preoccupation with salvation *within* the world is replaced – even if through a whole gamut of beliefs and attitudes – by a concern for salvation *from* the world. But, as already emphasised, these demands remain in general the prerogative of restricted circles that give new interpretations to ancient traditions and more recent “mysteries”. The result is a play of projections that, without a careful preliminary analysis of the sources and their historical contexts, could lead to the belief that the soteriological perspectives were the basic element of the mysteries. In the case of Attis in particular, the “mysteries” seems to be closely connected with the Galli⁵³ and later with the *taurobolium*⁵⁴. They are intended, either through the mediation of the castrated priest or through the direct contact provided by the bull sacrifice, to guarantee an intra-cosmic type of well-being and health⁵⁵. But philosophical and Christian interpretations were to interfere in such a

⁴⁹ It is the bull to be emasculated.

⁵⁰ Cf. Chirassi Colombo 1982, p. 326.

⁵¹ Cf. Brelich 1963, pp. 37-50.

⁵² Cf. Chirassi Colombo 1982, pp. 326-327; Ribichini 1982a, pp. 636-637.

⁵³ According to both Prudentius (*Perist.* X 1061-1065) and Augustine (*De civ. dei* VII 26), a beatific afterlife was reserved to them.

⁵⁴ Apart from all modern interpretations, this was the thought of the ancients.

⁵⁵ The Galli heal both the mind and the body, practise purificatory rituals, foretell the future, etc. (cf. Graillet 1912, pp. 306-312); the *taurobolium* is connected to the

decisive way on the data as to make it almost impossible to make an exact distinction between event and exegesis. If this process of reading differently affects many deities of “paganism”, because of his intrinsic characteristics, Attis appears as one of the privileged matters on which pagans and Christians are in confrontation. In a complex process of acquiring data, different readings and reinterpretations of those different readings, both parties would try to compare Attis with Christ.

The soteriological perspectives are not merely a late development of more ancient traditions that have been distorted and changed. For the “pagans” an Attis who is *sōtēr* is the last bulwark for opposing the Christian invasion, to defend at all costs, even to the point of making Attis an *alter ego* of Christ himself. An Attis who is *sōtēr*, whose March rituals and violent death recall in a disquieting way the death of the Saviour himself, to whom Attis, after all, is chronologically earlier, is for the Christians a danger which has to be fought without excluding blows⁵⁶.

The epilogue to this struggle is universally known: the winner would be the only true resurrected one, Christ. Paradoxically, it is in defeat itself that Attis was to regain his own more authentic dimension: a person destined to die.

well-being of the individual and/or the emperor; the taurobolic inscriptions are not lacking in references to a “higher” health, which is also to be connected to life on earth (Duthoy 1969, nn. 13 and 33). The need to repeat the ritual seems to mean that it dealt with a praxis which was essentially purificatory in nature. Concerning the statement of the *tauroboliatus* who states that he is *in eternum renatus* (Duthoy 1969, n. 23), it may be observed that the term *aeternus* involves the concept of being perennial, rather than of a transcendent eternity in a Christian sense (cf. Turcan 1989, p. 58).

⁵⁶ On the parallel and contrary danger, cf. H.-D. Betz (Betz 1996), according to whom the authors of the Gospels were fully aware that Christ could be characterised in accordance with an heroic model.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

If there is a basic principle that has inspired this study and, in some sense, has been imposed on it almost autonomously as a line to follow, it has been the conscious refusal to present the umpteenth survey of Attis as chiefly connected with vegetation, in which his specific characteristics would be exhausted. This reading has emerged as incomplete, reductive and not sufficiently justified by the documentary evidence. In fact, it does not take even the slightest account of the complex meanings and functions that form this mythical and ritual set. Also, it has been largely superseded by more recent and authoritative studies. On the other hand, by distancing myself from other approaches, I do not wish to deny that they are interesting, neither have I structured my research by proposing a human Attis as the alternative to a possible and “original” divine Attis. Those who have adopted this approach have maintained that the divine Attis was entirely a classical construct or invention, that arose within different religious views chronologically later than the Anatolian context – in particular, the Phrygian context – that, without proof to the contrary, is the original culture of Attis, or at least the earliest to which our sources allow us to go. According to this approach, in the far distant past, Attis was not a god but a simple “priest” of the Great Mother, even if, as a member of the royal family, if not the king himself, he was the most eminent. Only after contact with Greek and Roman culture would he assume those divine prerogatives that unequivocally are characteristic of him in the imperial period.

Undoubtedly Attis had a long and complex history, of which certain particular phases can be identified, chiefly documented by the “re-readings” of his myths and cult, first in the Greek and then in the Roman world. Of course, this was anything but isolated or uncommon in the ancient world, part of those “general” laws of acculturation that, in the case of religions, have special and complex aspects to be analysed in each case with the greatest attention. The circumstance that classical tradition accepted and valued Attis in various ways, adapting him to their cultural parameters and religious viewpoints, at the same time leaving for us by far the largest amount of

documents on these processes, does not mean, however, that this interpretative filter is to be considered the most representative and that this is the only or the most “authentic” Attis. Whatever the results of this approach may be, at least it has the merit of giving historical depth to the study, suitably setting out the problem of a diachronic and intercultural development of Attis and the religious traditions connected with him. For this choice of direction I have assumed that approach as a reference point for my own research, without allowing myself to be conditioned by it. This has meant attempting to tackle the problem of the relationship between myth and history without preconceived schematics that do not do justice to the extreme complexity characteristic of religious-historical approach to Attis.

In the first chapter of this book, the mythical traditions about Attis were reconsidered and the salient points of the positions held by the scholars, emphasising the classical-centred viewpoint that marked them .

Certainly, that line of approach has made a fundamental contribution to the history of studies of that character, helping to discredit Frazer’s obsolete pattern of the dying god, understood as an ancient numen of vegetation and fertility. Yet, in spite of everything, a considerable number of nostalgic scholars continue to remain faithful to it. But once it was shown that there never was an ancient Anatolian god called Attis connected with the seasonal cycle and that he was possibly a classical “creation”, I think that some very important questions remained open that needed to be faced. Whereas the Great Mother’s background was becoming ever clearer and more composite, the scant and meagre evidence for Attis in the pre-classical period seemed to render almost desperate any attempt at reconstructing his remotest past without straying into the terrain of conjectures or hypotheses that cannot be proved.

The first objective that I set myself in this study, which is dealt with in the second chapter, has therefore been to try to reexamine critically all the oldest evidence on Attis, resorting, where the documentation allowed, to comparison with religious traditions that are earlier than or contemporary with Phrygian culture, which is regarded by ancient and modern scholars alike as the cradle of Attis.

There emerged a picture in which the equation Attis = priest/king seemed too reductive and did not give justice to the complexity of the data. The data, yet again, revealed processes of revision, the various

phases of which cannot always be distinguished clearly, though that should not mean that they had to be forced arbitrarily into a single formulation. While accepting the hypothesis that the name Attis could originally have been connected with a ritual function, probably performed by the Phrygian royal family, I have also considered it important to stress how at a particular moment it was also used to connote a specific person who, at least in what reasonably appears to be his culture of origin, was projected into an extra-human dimension, making him into the object of a cult. On the other hand, care has been taken not to assign him *tout court* to the group of gods or heroes, which are categories of Greek culture, and only approximately can be used for different religio-historical phenomena.

In the specific case of the oldest cultural context of Attis, it must be admitted that Phrygian culture still remains largely an enigma for the historian, given the amount of sources and their nature. However, it is not arbitrary to try to provide an outline, as far as possible, of what can be glimpsed, and here the historian of religions can make use of comparison that allows research to be conducted which is not absolutely conditioned by the lack of precise historical data. Privileged perspectives for comparison are the cultures of the ancient Near East, royal and funerary ideology and various related conceptions, especially in Anatolia. Against this background is an outline of an indigenous cultural legacy with a fairly indistinct substratum, difficult to define, of which we are able to glimpse only the Hittite tradition, on the one hand, and vague elements of Hurrian tradition on the other, into which in one way or another, Phrygian culture is grafted (or continues, alongside many other culturally independent elements).

Coming to the later spread of the Attis cult in the Greek and Roman world, account has been taken of the inevitable reformulations due to ideological adaptations. Besides studying these, which, as has been said, largely form our current image of Attis, it was however fundamental to take the correct approach, no longer and not only in a classical-centred direction.

Accordingly, in the third chapter I tackled the classical world, trying to collect the elements of continuity and of innovation in respect of the mythical and cultic traditions that for convenience we define as "microasiatic". An essential criterion in these passages has always been not to move on an abstract level and thus not to dislodge Attis and his cult from the cultural context in which over time he is inserted, taking account as far as possible of the political, social and eco-

nomic implications typical of every age and culture. Always keeping in mind the “hard kernel” of the Attis traditions in Phrygia – the royal and funerary connotations – it was possible to establish that in Greece as well as in Rome these aspects have played a special role in the various ideological frameworks into which they were received. They have been overturned, reinterpreted, at any rate revised for different political and religious functions, but they have never ceased to be present, forming an implicit and continual cultural landmark.

Attention has been drawn to a further level of revision in chapter four, where I have tackled the problem, so to speak, of the “exegesis of exegesis”, that is of those processes of reinterpretation of the traditional cults that both the “pagan” philosophers and the fathers of the Church effected with different and often opposing purposes. These led in turn to fitting those cults into different contexts within completely new ideologies. Here considerable space has been given to the speculations of the Gnostic sect of the Naassenes and to the *V Oration* of the Emperor Julian, in an attempt at defining the relationships between the two documents.

Yet another interesting aspect seems to have emerged from the research, related to the processes of assimilation and/or identification of Attis with other extra-human characters, heroes or gods, of classical tradition. This phenomenon in the imperial period is closely connected with solar theology and henotheism. Lastly, an attempt was made to show how this tendency to create a single model into which several mythical characters are to be fitted is still to be found in the work of some modern scholars and how it sometimes seriously affects an objective analysis of the sources.

The link between Attis and Death, specifically discussed in the fifth chapter, is an aspect that emerges very clearly and is characteristic of Attis even in the earliest evidence. From that point of view, I have tried particularly to draw attention to the various formulations and different implications by which that connection appeared both in mythical and in ritual tradition, depending on the period and the various places of his cult. Particular emphasis has been given to the problem of possible perspectives of salvation in the Hereafter that the cult of Attis could provide his followers and to evidence for his presumed “resurrection”.

This has been the plan of research, which has not deliberately set out to be a global re-examination of the topic but is a new reading based on a working hypothesis that I have tried to verify, and that in

my opinion I have substantially confirmed. If the approach that I have adopted has succeeded in bringing to light various questions, even without claiming to have resolved them in all their implications, I think that I have at least helped to discuss anew a series of approaches and results previously taken for granted, more because of a certain methodological conservatism than because of the data objectively available from our sources.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAASH	Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae.
Abel	E. Abel (ed.), <i>Orphica, accedunt Procli hymni, hymni magici, hymnus in Isim aliaque eiusmodi carmina</i> , Leipzig – Praha 1885.
ABSA	Annals of the British School at Athens.
Adler	A. Adler (ed.), <i>Suidae Lexicon</i> , I-V, Leipzig 1928-38.
AE	L'Année épigraphique.
AfO	Archiv für Orientforschung.
AION	Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli.
ANRW	H. Temporini – W. Haase (eds.), <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> , Berlin-New York 1976—.
AnSt	Anatolian Studies.
AoF	Altorientalische Forschungen.
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament.
ARET	<i>Archivi reali di Ebla. Testi</i> , Roma 1981—.
ARW	Archiv für Religionswissenschaft.
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research.
Bekker	I. Bekker, <i>Anecdota Graeca</i> , I-III, Berlin 1814 (repr. Graz 1965).
BEFAR	Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome.
BCH	Bulletin de correspondance hellénique.
BICS	Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London.
Bidez	J. Bidez, <i>L'Empereur Julien. Oeuvres complètes</i> , I-II, Paris 1924.
Bidez – Cumont	J. Bidez – F. Cumont (eds.), <i>Iuliani Imperatoris epistulae leges poematia fragmenta varia</i> , Paris 1922.
BiOr	Bibliotheca Orientalis.
Boissonade	J.F. Boissonade, <i>Michael Psellus. De operatione daemonum</i> , Nürnberg 1838.
BSL	Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique.
CAH	<i>The Cambridge Ancient History</i> .
CIG	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> .
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> .
ClAnt	Classical Antiquity.
CQ	Classical Quarterly.
CRAI	Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.
Dindorf	G. Dindorf (ed.), <i>Scholia graeca in Aeschinem et Isocratem</i> , Oxford 1872.
EAA	Enciclopedia dell'arte antica classica e orientale.
EpAn	Epigraphica Anatolica
ERE	J. Hastings (ed.), <i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i> , Edinburgh 1908-1926.
FARG	Forschungen zur Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte.
FGrHist	F. Jacoby (ed.), <i>Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker</i> , Paris-Leiden 1923—.
Gaisford	Th. Gaisford (ed.), <i>Etymologicum Magnum</i> , Oxford 1848.
Geymonat a	M. Geymonat (ed.), <i>Scholia in Nicandri Alexipharmaca</i> , Milano 1974.
Geymonat b	M. Geymonat (ed.), <i>Eutecni Paraphrasis in Nicandri Alexipharmaca</i> , Milano 1976.

Gow – Page a	A.S.F. Gow – D.L. Page (eds.), <i>The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams</i> , I-II, Cambridge 1965.
Gow – Page b	A.S.F. Gow – D.L. Page (eds.), <i>The Greek Anthology: The Garland of Philip and Some Contemporary Epigrams</i> , I-II, Cambridge 1968.
Gow -Scholfield	A.S.F. Gow – A.F. Scholfield (eds.), <i>Nicander. The Poems and Poetical Fragments</i> , Cambridge 1953.
GRBS	Greek, Roman & Byzantine Studies.
Hansen	G. Ch. Hansen (ed.), <i>Sokrates. Kirchengeschichte</i> , Berlin 1995.
HR	History of Religions.
HTR	Harvard Theological Review.
IF	Indogermanische Forschungen.
IGSI	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae Siciliae et Italiae</i> , Berlin 1890.
Jahn	O. Jahn (ed.), <i>Auli Persii Flacci Satirarum liber cum scholiis antiquis</i> , Leipzig 1843 (repr. Hildesheim 1967).
JbAC	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum.
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies.
JIES	Journal of Indo-European Studies.
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies.
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies.
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies.
Kbo	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy</i> .
Kern	O. Kern (ed.), <i>Orphicorum fragmenta</i> , Berlin 1922.
KUB	<i>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköy</i> .
Lentz	A. Lentz (ed.), <i>Grammatici graeci recogniti et apparato critico instructi</i> , 3.1, Leipzig 1867.
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> .
MANL	Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Memorie.
Marcovich 1995	M. Marcovich (ed.), <i>Clementis Alexandrini Protrepticus</i> , Leiden-New York-Köln 1995.
Marshall 1993	P. K. Marshall (ed.), <i>Hygini Fabulae</i> , Stuttgart – Leipzig 1993.
MEFRA	Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome (Antiquité).
MemPontAcc	Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Memorie.
NSc	Notizie degli scavi di antichità.
OA	Oriens Antiquus.
Pfeiffer	R. Pfeiffer (ed.), <i>Callimachus</i> , I-II, Oxford 1949-1953.
Powell	J.U. Powell (ed.), <i>Collectanea alexandrina</i> , Oxford 1928.
PP	La parola del passato.
QUCC	Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica.
Rabe	H. Rabe (ed.), <i>Scholia in Lucianum</i> , Leipzig 1906.
RAC	Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum.
Radt	S. Radt (ed.), <i>Fragmenta tragicorum graecorum</i> , III, Göttingen 1985.
RB	Revue biblique.
REA	Revue des études anciennes.
REG	Revue des études grecques.
RGG	Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.
RHA	Revue hittite et asianique.
RhM	Rheinisches Museum.
RHR	Revue de l'histoire des religions.
RIA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie</i> .
RSF	Rivista di studi fenici.
SCCNH	Studies in the Culture and Civilization of Nuzi and the Hurrians.
SJOT	Scandinavian Journal for the Old Testament.

SMEA	Studi micenei ed egeo-anatolici.
Smith	A. Smith (ed.), <i>Porphyrii philosophi fragmenta</i> , Stuttgart-Leipzig 1993.
SMSR	Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni.
TAPA	Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association.
Theodoritis	C. Theodoritis (ed.), <i>Photii patriarchae Lexicon</i> , I-II, Berlin-New York 1982-1998.
TrGFr	B. Snell (ed.), <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , I, Göttingen 1986.
WJA	Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft.
WO	Die Welt des Orients.
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft.
ZA (NF)	Zeitschrift für Assyriologie (Neue Folge).
Zintzen	C. Zintzen (ed.), <i>Damascii Vitae Isidori reliquiae</i> , Hildesheim 1967.
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik.

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